The Political Career, Agenda and Narratives of Marielle Franco: An Intersectional Analysis

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Master's Thesis
University of Helsinki
Faculty of Arts
Area and Cultural Studies
Latin American Studies Track
November 2020

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Faculty of Arts		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Master's Programme in Area and Cultural Studies
Opintosuunta – Studieinriktning – Study Track Latin American Studies Track		
Tekijä – Författare – Author Ninni Karjalainen		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title The Political Career, Agenda and Narratives of Marielle Franco: An Intersectional Analysis		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master's thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year November 2020	Sivumäärä– Sidoantal – Number of pages 83 + 11 (references)

Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

This thesis examines the political career, agenda and narratives of Marielle Franco, a former city councillor of Rio de Janeiro. Franco ran for political office the first time in the municipal elections of 2016. Her campaign contained the demands of women and sexual minorities, black people and favela residents. With 46,502 votes, she was the fifth most voted-for council member. The councilwoman was assassinated on March 14, 2018, after leaving an event of black feminist activists. Her death was followed by rallies in several Brazilian cities. Many of the core organisers of these mass mobilisations were black women, and their actions ensured media visibility for the case. In the general elections of 2018, three cabinet members of Marielle Franco were elected to the State Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (Alerj), defending her political legacy.

The primary sources of the thesis comprise of speeches, campaign material, interviews and articles of Marielle Franco as well as public hearings, reports and other records of her term which lasted for fifteen months. The data also includes material produced by black women's movements following the councilwoman's assassination. The thesis approaches this material through counter-narrative methodology, which aims to integrate marginalised communities' voices and perspectives into the research agenda. The aim of the research is to contextualise the political career and agenda of Marielle Franco as a 'black woman from the favela of Maré'. To that end, the research draws from an intersectional theoretical framework, deploying it as an analytical tool. Intersectionality theorises the relationships between socio-cultural categories and identities. This thesis applies the intracategorical approach, entailing an in-depth study of a particular social group. The analysis focuses on low-income black women.

Brazilian black women are disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class and gender. They often work in the informal sector and are disproportionately affected by poverty. Race and gender discrimination prevent them from accessing positions of power. In 2016, the year when Marielle Franco was elected, black women comprised of more than 25% of the population, but represented only 5% of all elected councillors. Their exclusion from political institutions, where decisions concerning their lives are taken, render low-income black women vulnerable to governmental neglect and violations of their and their family members' fundamental human rights. The election of Marielle Franco was considered as a breakthrough in local politics and seen as an opportunity to change oppressive power structures.

The analysis reveals that the councilwoman empowered black women and favela residents to participate party politics in multiple ways. Franco brought their voices, bodies and demands into the institutional domain, and her powerful speeches voiced the concerns of black mothers resisting the state violence within their communities. She also asserted solidarity as part of an alternative political practice of black feminists. Besides being a councillor, Franco was also a scholar and a front-line human rights defender. The analysis also found that Franco's conception of human rights was based on the praxis developed in the Human Rights Commission of Alerj and centered on the black women of the favelas and urban outskirts. The counter-narratives deployed by Franco emphasised the legacy of feminist movements, including their leaders and symbols. She campaigned for recognising and valuing social differences and fought against all forms of discrimination within political institutions. Her politics and narratives continue to inspire young Brazilian women, particularly black women from the favelas and the urban peripheries.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Marielle Franco, Low-Income Black Women, Favela, Activism, Human Rights, Black Feminism, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Counter-Narratives, Intersectionality

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
Helda/ E-Thesis

Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information

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1 Introduction

1. Introduction

Marielle Fransisco da Silva, publicly known as Marielle Franco, was a councillor of Rio de Janeiro. There are many words often used to describe her: black woman, feminist, *favelada*[1], lesbian, human rights defender, activist, socialist, sociologist and mother in her adolescence. Indeed, the body-politics of Marielle were manifold. She was born and raised in *Complexo da Maré*[2], a poor neighbourhood in the north of Rio de Janeiro. From this vantage point of the marginalised, Marielle witnessed the impact that governmental neglect and institutional violence had on the lives of the black and low-income residents of the city. For Marielle, running for office as a 'black woman from the favela' was a question of urgency. She ran for city councillor in the municipal elections of 2016 under the left-wing Socialism and Liberty Party. Her campaign contained the demands of women and sexual minorities, black people and favela residents. With 46,502 votes, she was the fifth most voted-for council member. Marielle represented the voice of diversity in the 51-seated legislature. She was one of the only six women, one of the only two black women, and the only openly lesbian representative on the city council.

As a councillor, Marielle worked ceaselessly in planning targeted public policies for the low-income women of the favelas and urban outskirts, neglected by the local government. In only one year and three months, 16 bills were submitted, out of which seven[3] were approved as laws. They included measures such as: night nurseries for parents who work or study at night, a campaign in the public transportation system to raise awareness and combat sexual assault and harassment, compiling an annual report with statistics on violence against women, guaranteeing social and educational measures for young offenders, and a homage to the 18th-century black leader Thereza de Benguela.[4] As a powerful orator, Marielle made frequent use of the speaker's platform of the city council. She spoke in the name of the voiceless and denounced vehemently various forms of discrimination and human rights violations against women, the black population and the favela residents.

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[1] The Brazilian Portuguese (Br) term *favelado* (m.) / *favelada* (f.) refers to a resident of favela; 'slum-dweller' (Beaton and Washington 2015).

[2] A favela complex is a conjunction of many favelas. Maré covers 16 different favelas or communities.

[3] Two bills were approved as laws while Marielle was in office and five were approved posthumously.

[4] Franco (2018d, p. 187).

During her short term, Marielle also dedicated the most of her efforts to empower women, with emphasis on black women – the segment that represents more than 25% of the population, but only 5% of the councillors across Brazil.[5] One of the many activities organised by the cabinet of Marielle was labelled 'Young Black Women Moving Power Structures' at *Casa Das Pretas*, in downtown Rio. The title of the event pays homage to the Afro-American political activist and scholar Angela Davis. In her speech in Salvador, Davis had defended the transforming power of grassroots mobilisation, highlighting the role of black women's movement. "Because black women have always been positioned at the bottom of racial, economic, and gender hierarchies, when black women move, the whole structure of society moves with them", she proclaimed in 2017.[6] The black feminist event organised in downtown Rio brought together local young women to talk about activists' trajectories and the history of the resistance within the black women's movement. Marielle was assassinated in a car ambush after leaving the event on 14 March 2018. The crime that victimised both Marielle, and her driver, Anderson Gomes, is still under investigation while this thesis is being written.

Set in this context, this thesis examines the political career, agenda and narratives of Marielle Franco. The thesis departs from the standpoint of Marielle as a 'black woman from the favela', and offers a contextualised reading of this embodied and epistemological position. As illustrated briefly above, this standpoint did not only inform the content of her political discourses but also her practice as a councillor. The thesis will also provide insights into the ways that Marielle's narratives empowered low-income black women. These narratives are conceptualised as 'counter-narratives', emphasising how they offer resistance to dominant ideologies and narratives. The counter-narratives are analysed using an intersectional analytical lens.

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[5] Gênero e Número (2018).

[6] Braga (2017).

2 Background

2. Background

This chapter provides background information about the socioeconomic status of low-income black women in Brazil. Understanding their position in social structures is of utmost importance to effectively contextualise the political career and narratives of Marielle Franco. This will also lay out the basis for understanding the questions related to inequality, which I will discuss in the analysis. The perspective of my research is sociological and anchored in contemporary Brazilian society. To that end, I will mainly focus on the latest statistics to provide an overview of race, gender and class inequalities in the country. I will also address the question of urban inequality from the point of view of the Brazilian favelas. The last part of the chapter will present previous research from the perspective of Finnish Latin American studies, which is where I situate my own research. I will discuss this in relation to the topics covered by this thesis, emphasising works that are contextually grounded in Rio de Janeiro.

2.1. Race, Class and Gender Inequalities

Brazil ranks among the most unequal countries in the world.[7] Even though inequalities within the country have lessened over the previous decades, steep social divisions persist. In Brazil, such as in other Latin American countries, social inequality manifests itself as a certain dichotomy in social structure, dividing people in terms of living standards, economic opportunities, education, healthcare and access to cultural and leisure activities.[8] This dichotomy is an outcome of historical processes; notably, the history of colonialism and the forcible import of millions of African slaves.[9] In modern-day Brazil, structural racism continues to shape the social hierarchies, hindering the black population from accessing higher social positions, including positions of power. This is the case even though they are now in the majority in the country.

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[7] The GINI index (World Bank estimate) measures individual income differences within national borders. It has become a central instrument to measure inequality. The index depicts a scale in which 0 represents “perfect equality”, while an index of 100 implies complete inequality. In 2017, Brazil was reported at 53.30, making it the eight most unequal country in the world together with Belize and Botswana (Index mundi, n. d.).

[8] Seppänen (2014, p. 19).

[9] In 1888, Brazil was the last country in the world to formally abolish slavery.

I should first explain that there are two common terms in Brazil that refer to the racial category ‘black’. In addition to the official category of black, *preto*, used in the census, there is another, more comprehensive term for black; *negro*. The latter is generally perceived to be a degree more political and it is often used in an affirmative fashion.[10] In statistics, the category is worked by combining the ‘black’ (*preto*) and ‘brown or mixed-race’ (*pardo*). Examining these two groups together is justified by the fact that, even though distinct results can be obtained when comparing the ‘black’ and ‘brown’ groups, both groups face severe disadvantages in relation to the whites.[11] Calculated in this way, the majority of the Brazilians are black in the broader sense of the term. With there being more than 50 million black women, they account for more than one-fourth of the total population.[12] In this thesis, I use the term ‘black’ in the broader and the more political sense of the term.

Brazilian black women are disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class and gender. The data of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) show that the black population is disproportionately affected by unemployment, and within the world of work, nearly half (47.3%) of the black employees make their living in the informal economy.[13] The majority of the black women who work in the informal sector are engaged in domestic work. In the highly stratified society of Brazil, domestic work is an important structuring element of social economic relations.[14] This framework is directly reflected in the monthly income of different social groups. In 2018, the average monthly income of a white employee (R$ 2,796) was 73.9% higher than that of a black employee (R$ 1,608).[15] In a gender- and race-based comparison, black women are placed at the bottom of the income

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[10] Manner & Teivainen (2017, p. 119).

[11] Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (2013).

[12] The IBGE has adopted a classification system that is composed of five categories: white (*branco*), brown or mixed race (*pardo*), black (*preto*), yellow (*amarelo*) and indigenous (*indígena*). The respondents decide for themselves with which race/colour category they want to define themselves. In 2018, out of around 208 million Brazilians, 46.5% identified themselves as brown of mixed-race, 9.3% as black and 43.1% as white. Taken together, these three groups account for 98.9% of the Brazilian population, while the remaining 1.1% consists of those who declare themselves Asian or indigenous.

[13] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2019).

[14] Werneck & Iraci (2016).

[15] Overall, the income disparity is greater between blacks and whites is greater than the difference by gender. The wealth gap can also be illustrated by the fact that while the majority of Brazil’s population is black (55.8%), only 27.7% of this group were among the 10% with the highest income in 2018. By contrast, out of the 10% with the lowest income, the proportion of the blacks was 75.2%.

ladder, earning less than half (44.4%) of the income of white men. White women earn less than white men but more than black men.

As for education, there has been progress in closing the gap for the disadvantaged population.[16] Despite these achievements, the racial inequality persists particularly within the higher education system. The percentage of whites in the 18–24 age group who attended or had already completed higher education was almost double that which was observed among blacks in the same age group (36.1% and 18.3% respectively). The enrolment in higher education-institutions is among the greatest obstacles for black people: in 2018, the entry rate was 35.4% among the black population and 53.2% among the white. Besides differences between the public and private schools, another factor that explains this outcome is the greater proportion of black students who have to work or look for work.[17] It should also be mentioned that although black women have better educational indicators than black men, the high school completion rate of white men (72.0%) is higher than that of black women (67.6%). Moreover, while a higher education level tends to translate into higher wage returns, the white population receives a higher income than the black population regardless of education level.[18]

Finally, violence is associated with race and gender inequality. The homicide rate is a widely used indicator to measure the incidence of violence. It can be observed that blacks are disproportionately represented among homicide victims. In 2017, there were a total of 65,602 registered homicides – the highest annual rate of violent deaths in the country so far. Out of these homicides, 75.5% of the victims were black men.[19] Since these statistics are so starkly marked with a specific racial and age group (most murdered men were 15–29 years old), the civil society organisations have tended to refer to the phenomenon as the ‘genocide of black youth’.[20] The incidence of feminicide also makes Brazil one of the most dangerous countries

[16] For instance, the proportion of black students aged 18–24 attending higher education rose from 50.5% to 55.6% between 2016 and 2018. The proportion of whites is 78.8%. An array of measures has been adopted from the 2000s onwards to democratise the access to higher-education institutions, both in the public and private spheres. Such measures include: implementation of the quota system, scholarship programmes and expansion of student financing.

[17] In 2018, 61.8% of young adults aged 18–24 with complete high school education who did not attend to school because of work-related reasons were black.

[18] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2019).

[19] Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada & Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (2019).

[20] Werneck and Iraci (2016).

to be a woman in.[21] Besides being marked by gender, feminicide is also directly linked to race and class. Whereas the homicide rates of white women increased by 4.5% between 2007 and 2017, the homicide rates of black women increased by 29.9% over the same period.[22]

2.2. Urban Inequality: The Brazilian Favela

Brazilian favelas are expressions of enduring socio-economic and racial inequality. It should also be emphasised that they are connected to the disadvantaged urban dwellers' struggle over space.[23] Their demographic constitution of these self-built neighbourhoods results from the initial settlement process of impoverished former slaves, and the migration of disadvantaged rural workers into urban centres since the 19th century. The expansion of the favelas in the first half of the 20th century is mainly attributed to the migration wave of northeastern rural workers to the rapidly growing southeastern industrial cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.[24] Favelas and similar settlements have since increased both in number and size across Brazil. According to the official data of IBGE, collected during the 2010 Census, 11.4 million people (6% of the population) lived in favelas and similar settlements.[25]

Rio de Janeiro, the former capital of Brazil, has the largest slum population: in 2010, out of the total population of 6.3 million, 1.4 million residents, that is, 22% of the whole population lived in the 763 favelas of the city.[26] The preliminary data of the IBGE, collected for the census of 2020; postponed for 2021, point towards a considerable increase in the number and size of favelas in comparison with the last census.[27] The majority of the favela residents are black. The Census of 2010 found that in the two largest Brazilian municipalities, São Paulo

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[21] Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada & Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (2019). In 2017, there were a total of 4,936 cases; about 13 murders a day.

[22] Ibid. In 2015, Brazil passed Law 13.104 on feminicide, specifically criminalising the gender-motivated killing of women. However, this law and other instruments created to prevent violence against women largely neglect the inequities caused by racism and the complexity of the violence faced by black women.

[23] Ystanes (2018, pp. 84, 89).

[24] Custódio (2016, p. 60).

[25] The IBGE uses the term 'subnormal agglomerate' in reference to "irregular settlements such as favelas, invaded areas, slums in deep valleys, slums in low-lands, communities, villages, slums in backwaters, irregular lots, shacks and stilt houses" (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística n. d.).

[26] Galdo (2011).

[27] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2020).

and Rio de Janeiro, it is twice as common for a black person to reside in a favela than for a white person. In Rio, 30.5% of black people lived in favelas, while the percentage registered among white people was 14.3%.[28] While many low-income families reside in favelas, not all favela residents are poor. Their overall economic input is by no means insignificant: a 2019 study revealed that favela residents generate R$ 119.8 billion a year.[29]

Unlike in other Brazilian cities, where slums are mainly built on the urban fringes, in Rio de Janeiro favelas occupy the hillsides surrounding the city centre. The urban development efforts have aimed to remove the favelas from these lands as they have become increasingly attractive to real estate investors. In the 1960s and the 1970s, entire neighbourhoods were destroyed in the inner city and then rebuilt to make them available to the middle and upper classes.[30] The disadvantaged favela residents were displaced to peripheral areas, which aggravated their geographical and socioeconomic marginalisation even further. These mass evictions became rarer with the 1980s democratic opening. Currently, the removal of favelas is a more multifaceted process. It is carried out through a combination of forced removals, rent inflation, gentrification and militarisation.[31] The military operations within the favelas have been mainly justified through the ‘war on drugs’ discourse by the political elite.

This unofficial ‘urban war’ has been fought against the drug trafficking gangs that have taken over Rio’s favelas since the early 1980s. A Presidential Decree for the Guarantee Law and Order (GLO) has authorised the use of the armed forces in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The law permits the use of tanks and soldiers in the favela territories. Various organisations and researchers have described these measures as unconstitutional, emphasising how they systematically violate the rights of favela residents and reinforce the criminalisation of poverty.[32] Shootings and violent police incursions frequently victimise civilians, mainly black youth. Police officers also lose their lives as a consequence of the military state intervention. Yet, fearful of the high crime rates, the public at large has supported the policy. The killings

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[28] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2019).

[29] Boehm (2020).

[30] Manner & Teivainen (2017, pp. 157-158).

[31] Ystanes (2018, pp. 83-84).

[32] Assumpção et al. (2018, p. 130).

have been justified as inevitable casualties in the fight against crime.[33] In addition to this, vast parts of low-income districts in the state of Rio de Janeiro are dominated by *militia*, paramilitary groups. While often considered as a 'parallel power', they are actually connected to the lawmakers. The militia members exercise armed control over a territory and profit by selling real estates and controlling public goods. They are also paid to conduct summary executions.[34] In sum, expanding militarisation exerts a great toll on Rio's impoverished neighbourhoods.

2.3. Previous Research

Journalist Maria Manner and political scientist Teivo Teivainen have mapped Brazil's political, social and economic developments at the turn of the 21st century. Their volume (2017) includes fieldwork extending over a period of three years (2013–2016) and covers different regions through a thematic approach, offering an introduction to the country's most pressing issues. Part of their research covers Rio de Janeiro, addressing topics such as urban conflicts, social mobility, mass protests and the legacy of the international megaevents: the FIFA World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016).[35] This transformation has also been tracked by Kirsi Cheas, although from a different angle. Her doctoral thesis (2018) analyses how local people and institutions are given a voice in the American and Finnish world news articles. In addition to South Africa, she examines and measures the news frames concerning Brazil as the country was preparing to host the FIFA World Cup. Rather than looking at sports, she examines the societies under transformation, and whether the Northern world news reflect such transformations. Her research challenges the view of the so-called Global South as voiceless or marginalised in the Northern news articles.[36]

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[33] Manner & Teivainen (2017, pp. 125-126).

[34] Alves (2003).

[35] Manner & Teivainen (2017).

[36] Cheas (2018). It is worth mentioning that Cheas' analysis includes the articles of the above-mentioned journalist Maria Manner, who stayed in Rio while working as the foreign correspondent for the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in 2014. Cheas summarises that whereas marginal political movements and alternative media received very little space in the news frames in general, a large number of disenfranchised and lower middle-class individuals was quoted by the papers. That was especially the case with the coverage of Brazil by *Helsingin Sanomat*. (p. 267).

As for Rio de Janeiro, Cheas discusses the news coverage of the military operations that were ordered by the state authorities to secure the city before the World Cup and the Olympics.[37] This topic is important for my thesis, since Marielle Franco's political career is intimately connected to the question of militarisation within Rio's favelas. She wrote her Master's thesis on the subject, entitled 'UPP – The Decline of the Favela in Three Letters: An Analysis of Public Security Policy in the State of Rio de Janeiro' (2014). The pacification policy (UPP) has also been examined in detail from the perspective of its legitimisations, representations and security discourses by Mirka Wendt in her Master's thesis (2016). Wendt takes a critical stance towards the implementation of UPP, asking the question: "what is the rationale behind a military response in an officially peaceful context?".[38] Her analysis reveals that the discourses employed to legitimise the pacification policy portray the situation of the favelas as chaotic and out of control, requiring urgent intervention. Furthermore, the favelas are seen through these discourses as an existential threat to the survival of the formal city. Wendt's discussion of the criminalisation of poverty and Brazil's black youth in official public security discourses offers important background information for my research.

Leonardo Custódio, a Brazilian researcher based in Finland, brings forth the perspective of the low-income youth of the favela, addressing their engagement with media activism. The ethnographic field research that he conducted for his doctoral thesis (2016) covers several of Rio's slums, including *Complexo da Maré* that is contextually important for my thesis. The author explains that media activism can be understood as an enactment of citizenship within these urban spaces. Their residents engage with the media mainly for purposes related to raising consciousness about inequality and human rights violations. Furthermore, they the use media to organise different forms of political activities. Custódio's contextualised discussion of counter-publics and grassroots political organising in favela territories brings forward various important insights. Furthermore, his research offers a grounded investigation of the organisations, institutions and resources within Rio's slums for citizen-driven online activism.[39]

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[37] Cheas (2018, pp. 190-200).

[38] Wendt (2016, p. 4).

[39] Custódio (2016).

3 Setting the Research

3. Setting the Research

In this chapter, I will present my research questions and objectives and describe the data used to answer them. I will start by describing the research situation that shaped the topic and approach of the thesis.

3.1. Research Situation

As stated in the introduction, the event 'Young Black Women Moving Power Structures', organised on 14 March 2018, was the last event Marielle attended. After leaving the *Casa das Pretas*, around 9:30 pm, the 38-year-old councillor was shot dead in an ambush together with her driver Anderson Gomes in the neighbourhood of Estácio, near the city centre.[40] The death of Marielle reverberated fast in social networks. The next morning, a multitude of people had gathered spontaneously in front of the City Hall of Rio de Janeiro, Cinelândia, to mourn the murdered politician. The coffins were carried through the multitude of people for the wake that was held inside the city hall. The same evening, large-scale rallies took place in Rio, largely led by the movements of black women and favela activists, calling for justice for the murders and protesting against police brutality and military operations. Many of the protesters were women and the LGTB+ community members for whom the election of Marielle had been a breakthrough in local politics.[41] Thousands of protestors sympathetic to the councillor's causes took to the streets in Salvador, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Brasília as well.[42] Noting the growing proportions of the rallies, one Brazilian journalist came to declare that it was the first time that the "nation claimed a black body on a massive scale".[43]

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[40] In March 2019, two former Rio de Janeiro police officers with connections to paramilitary groups were arrested as suspects for executing the murder that was planned in detail for months. Moreover, later in 2019, Brazil's top prosecutor accused several people of trying to obstruct the investigation into the murder. The investigations carried out by Rio civil police are still ongoing and those who ordered the execution are yet to be identified after two and half years.

[41] Coelho (2018); Miguez (2018).

[42] G1 News (2018a).

[43] Tatagiba (2018).

At the time, I was working in Brasília, the capital, and came to follow the case closely due to the media monitoring I was conducting as part of my internship programme. It was obvious how the public manifestations were shaping the media coverage: In the first instance, on March 15, the news reporting on the death of Marielle did not make front-page news, and she was referred to in the news articles with rather generic terms (e.g., 'councillor of Rio'). After the rallies, on March 16, all the main national newspapers had an aerial image of the two coffins being carried through the multitude of people gathered in front of Cinelândia on their cover.[44] The protests proliferating across the country had guaranteed visibility to the case. The hegemonic media doesn't normally report on black women being assassinated or on other human rights violations, especially not on the front page. The protests thus forced the media to change this policy.[45]

I would like to emphasise that the majority of Brazilians did not know who Marielle Franco was and what she represented. Due to the repercussions, the national media outlets had to find that out and explain it to the general audience. While there probably was a genuine attempt to provide an informative account of the case in general, the problem was that the journalists and television presenters who tried to explain the background, political career of and causes defended by Marielle, were not familiar with the world which she represented. There are some structural factors that may explain this, for example, the profile of most journalists: 68% of the Brazilian journalists are white women and at least 30 years old, whereas only 5% of Brazilian journalists are black. According to Mendes and Magalhães, this disparity mirrors the way that cases such as that of Marielle Franco are presented in the media.[46]

Indeed, some journalists denounced the attempt by the traditional media to 'whitewash' the story and politics of Marielle. For example, American journalist Glenn Greenwald argued that *Rede Globo*, Brazil's most influential media outlet, was trying to take hold of the story that had exploded through citizen-driven online activism, and turn Marielle into an "unthreatening symbol of political clichés". For Greenwald, this reminded of the media tactic used in the US to co-opt the memory of Martin Luther King to the official discourses. He saw that there was a similar attempt to domesticate the political legacy of Marielle by erasing its most radical

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[44] See Vercapas.com.br (2018).

[45] Barbosa & Santiago (2018).

[46] Mendes & Magalhães (2018).

components. Furthermore, the journalist unveiled the perversity of the discursive appropriations by the media corporation: the image of Marielle and the repercussions caused by her death were used to justify the ongoing federal intervention and militarisation of the public security system in the state of Rio de Janeiro – a measure that Marielle had vocally opposed.[47] One of her final tweets spoke out against the police violence in the favela of Acari. Another denounced a murder in Maguinhos. She wrote: “Another youth homicide that could be credited to the Military Police. Matheus Melo was leaving church. How many others will have to die for this war to end?”[48]

In addition to the above-mentioned ‘whitewashing’ by the traditional media, there was another serious concern: a defamatory campaign that fabricated fake news articles to tarnish the image of Marielle and to delegitimise her political legacy. It showed the extent to which her politics continued to disturb certain ideological groups even after her death. These fake-news articles that had started to circulate in social media since the day of the attack (e.g., claims that she was married to a notorious drug dealer and that her candidacy had been backed by a drug gang) played into toxic stereotypes about black women from the favelas. Some Brazilian politicians and even a judge came to endorse them in the public.[49] Schirmer and Dalmolin labelled this public hate speech campaign as the ‘second death’ of Marielle.[50] As the repercussions were expanding in the media, so did the defamatory campaign. The family of Marielle raised a lawsuit to remove the odious content from online platforms[51] and filed a criminal complaint against the judge who had stated that Marielle was “engaged with bandits”.[52] The cabinet members of Marielle also created a website[53] to debunk circulating fake news.

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[47] Greenwald (2018). President Michel Temer (MDB) had decreed the federal intervention in Rio de Janeiro and the militarisation of public security in February 2018. Marielle was appointed on a council committee overseeing the military intervention.

[48] Franco (2018a).

[49] G1 News (2018b).

[50] Schirmer & Dalmolin (2018).

[51] Teixeira (2018).

[52] R7 News (2018).

[53] https://www.mariellefranco.com.br/.

In the midst of the politicised debates about Marielle, black women raised their voices to defend her memory and to speak about her as "one of their own".[54] They organised events and mobilised communication campaigns in social networks to share their narratives about who Marielle Franco was and why her politics mattered. The year 2018 was an important election year: in October's general elections, Brazilian voters would elect officials at the federal and state levels, including the president, federal deputies, senators, governors and state deputies.[55] The mobilisation of black women generated a campaign labelled 'Seeds of Marielle' (Br. 'Sementes de Marielle') which defended the political legacy of Marielle. Three cabinet members of Marielle were elected to the State Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (Alerj): The chief of staff Renata Souza, and the two parliamentary advisors Dani Monteiro and Mônica Fransisco. A documentary named 'Seeds: Black Women in Power' (Br. 'Sementes: Mulheres Pretas no Poder, 2020) accompanied the campaigns of six black women[56] in Rio de Janeiro. The 'Marielle effect' had also boosted various other candidacies of young black women and favela residents across the country.[57] According to the election to the election data of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), a total of 4,398 black women ran for political office in the elections of 2018. This accounted for an 93% increase in the number of black women candidates compared to the last elections.

3.2. Research Questions and Objectives

This thesis is a case study and its aim is to *examine the political career and narratives of Marielle Franco as a 'black woman from the favela'*. My approach is sociological, and I am particularly interested in the collective representativity of Marielle's voice, identity and political agenda. My intention is to analyse her political career and agenda *from an intersectional perspective, placing emphasis on low-income black women*. I will also examine *how counter-narratives were deployed by Marielle*, on the one hand *to contest dominant*

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[54] Aguiar (n.d.).

[55] Marielle was listed to be vice-nominee with Tarcísio Motta (PSOL-RJ) to the state government in the general elections.

[56] The six black women were: Jaqueline de Jesus (PT), Mônica Francisco (PSOL), Renata Souza (PSOL), Rose Cipriano (PSOL), Tainá de Paula (PCdoB) and Talíria Petrone (PSOL).

[57] El País (2018).

ideologies and narratives, and on the other hand *how they were crafted to empower other black women and favela residents*.

The decision to focus on the standpoint of Marielle as a 'black woman from the favela' is motivated by the will to look beyond the master narratives that often distort and silence the voices of socially and politically marginalised black women, as discussed above. In this vein, focusing on the counter-narratives, and the act of framing them as such, includes an intention to give visibility to the voices and narratives of Brazilian black women, at least in a non-Portuguese speaking academic context in which this thesis is written. Having said that, I position myself as a white woman and stress that by discussing topics such as black women and their political representation, I do not intend to *speak for* black women. I have attempted to remain sensitive to the critiques that various black commentators have made in the public. If possible, my intention is to *speak with* the research subjects.

3.3. Primary Sources

I have examined a large body of material collected from various sources. It includes different types of material, entailing genres such as public speeches, interviews, blog posts, tweets, magazine and news paper articles as well as official reports. The primary sources are listed below.

a) Campaign material, speeches, published articles (including academic articles) by Marielle Franco (2016–2018)
b) Published interviews with Marielle Franco (2016–2018)
c) Public speeches, events and hearings organised by the cabinet, archived by the city council of Rio de Janeiro (2017–2018)
d) Videos and texts produced by black women's movements following Marielle's assassination (2018–2019)
e) Speeches, articles and other material produced by Marielle's former cabinet members (2018–2019)

While the primary sources of this thesis consist of online material, it should be noted that I followed the case of Marielle Franco and the mobilisations of black women for the 2018 general elections in Brazil, first in the capital (from March to June 2018) and then in Rio de Janeiro (September 2018 to January 2019). As described above, my investigation into the topic started as media monitoring of Marielle's case. I followed closely both traditional media outlets and social media networks, and participated in events organised in Marielle's memory both in Brasília and in Rio de Janeiro. Some of the material analysed in the thesis was acquired through these events. However, I resorted only to material that is publicly available and produced with the same intention. It should also be mentioned that I initially intended to focus on activism within the favela of Maré in my research, and only later decided to write about Marielle Franco. Even though I eventually decided not to conduct fieldwork or solicit formal interviews, my visits to Maré and conversations with local activists and researchers provided me with valuable insights and contextual knowledge to write this thesis.

The thesis takes the narratives of Marielle Franco as a starting point, both in written and spoken form. Some of this archival material was brought to my attention because of the repercussions in the media, as interviews, speeches and texts came to be published as an homage to Marielle. In this respect, *Mídia NINJA*[58], a well-known collective of citizen journalists, merits a special mention. In 2016, *Mídia NINJA* reported on the electoral debate under the platform 'Councillors that We Want', giving visibility to progressive candidates defending democratic values and principles. One of these candidates was Marielle. *Mídia NINJA* collaborated with her campaign, producing some of the campaign videos that became widely distributed in the media after the March 14, 2018.[59] In addition to this, Dríade Aguiar, one of the founders of the journalist network, directed communication campaigns related to Marielle, including a documentary of activist testimonies labelled 'Black Women for Marielle' (Br. 'Pretas para Marielle').[60]

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[58] Mídia NINJA was founded in 2013 (Mídia NINJA, n.d.). The collective of citizen journalists became nationally known in the manifestations of June 2013 for making live coverages among the young protestors and giving visibility to perspectives that were not shown by the traditional media. The collective asserts to be an "openly partial form of media coverage" that is committed to democratic values and rights.

[59] Mídia NINJA (2016a; 2017).

[60] Aguiar (n.d.). Aguiar described the aim of this project in a way that was emblematic to the mobilisation of black women following the repercussions in the national media: "After following the increasing number of narratives around one of the icons of my generation and my friend (…) I proposed: black women need to talk about theirs. The memory of our companion in the struggle deserves our perspectives, our narratives".

The analysis also includes events and public hearings organised under Marielle's term. Their transcripts are archived by the city council and are available through the website of the institution.[61] The cabinet members also published a report describing the main activities of the Women's Commission, which was chaired by Marielle.[62] All material was analysed in their original language, Portuguese, and the translations are my own.

Three photographs (on page 1, 12 and 35) used for illustrative purposes in this thesis are uploaded from the archives of *Mídia NINJA*[63], and are available under the creative commons license. The three other photographs (on page 4, 20 and 79) depicting the interiors of Rio's City Hall are taken by me during my stay in the city.

[61] http://www.camara.rj.gov.br/.

[62] Equipe Vereadora Marielle Franco (2018).

[63] *Mídia NINJA* (2019).

4 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

4. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first part will present the framework of counter-narratives[64] and the second part will focus on the framework of intersectionality. These two main frameworks used in the thesis have a common analytical origin in critical legal studies. Both of them are also used as a part of socially conscious research methodology, challenging scholars of various disciplines to integrate marginalised voices and perspectives into their research agenda. The thesis draws from the interdisciplinary knowledge base of gender studies, critical race theory[65] and narrative inquiry. The purpose of counter-narrative for theoretical framing is to bring into scholarship the experiences of those at the margins of society with the aim of criticising dominant narratives. In this vein, they provide a conceptual lens or window through which we gain another perspective into the social world. Intersectionality, in turn, is evoked in the research as an analytical tool to examine counter-narratives. It has become the primary device to analyse questions of oppression and identity within feminist scholarship, offering valuable insights into understanding the relationships between social categories, such as race, class and gender.

4.1. Counter-Narratives

Counter-narratives are defined here as the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalised.[66] It is a positional concept that acquires its meaning in relation to dominant narratives that are normative and often oppressive, excluding perspectives that diverge from them.[67] The idea of ‘counter’ contains the recognition that

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[64] The term does not have a fixed spelling. It also appears in the literature as *counternarrative* and *counter narrative*. *Counterstory* (or counter-story), and *counter-storytelling* are also used in a similar fashion with counter-narratives.

[65] Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework in social sciences and a movement consisting of activists and scholars interested in studying and working towards equality and social justice. CRT grew out of critical legal studies (CLS) in the 1970s in the Unites States. CLS scholars of colour, including Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Richard Delgado and Mari Matsuda, developed legal interventions by examining the lived experience of the law rather than legal texts or precedents. One of the central premises of CRT is that race and racism play fundamental structuring roles in society (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, pp. 2-4).

[66] Kraehe (2015); Mora (2014); Solórzano & Yosso (2002).

[67] Bamberg & Andrews (2004).

those positioned at the margins of society can act in ways to effectively resist these narratives. Yet counter-narratives are not only created as a direct response to dominant discourse but also go beyond them, giving agency to and empowering those who voice them. By creating narratives based on their own voices and perspectives, members of marginalised communities can represent their realities in a more complex way.[68] Inquiries into counter-narratives can be traced back to the 1990s and onwards when the term found application within narrative inquiry.[69] In particular, feminist critique and critical race theory embraced the agentic potential of narrative accounts.[70] Over the recent years, various fields such as political science, sociology, education, psychology and postcolonial and indigenous studies have come to incorporate counter-narratives as part of their research methodologies.[71]

4.1.1. Counter-Narratives vis-à-vis Master Narratives

Although the term counter-narratives appears in the literature more frequently these days, it actually remains undertheorised.[72] One such attempt is the volume *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (2001) by feminist ethicist Hilde Lindemann Nelson. Augmenting the narrative approaches of ethicists such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty, and Charles Taylor, Nelson theorises on the connection between identity and agency that is presupposed by a ‘counterstory’. Nelson analyses groups such as nurses, transsexuals, Romani people and mothers who create counterstories to resist dominant institutional, cultural and social narratives that those in relative positions of power tell about them. She argues that the dominant stories told about one’s self define these subjects as morally unworthy of respect, disempowering them person from exercising their moral agency. Nelson’s main thesis is that if identities can be narratively damaged, they can also be narratively repaired.

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[68] Mora (2014); Solórzano & Yosso (2002).

[69] Narratives entered the scholarly debates in the 1990s with the ‘narrative turn’ in humanities and social sciences. The narrative turn saw an increasing interest in applying concepts originally established in literary scholarship in different fields of human inquiry, from historiography to psychology and law (Ritivoi 2013, p. 289).

[70] Miller et al. (2020, p. 270); Talbot (1996, p. 226).

[71] Mora (2014).

[72] Rimstead & Beneventi (2019, p. 14).

According to Nelson, the stories created by oppressed groups function as “narrative acts of insubordination”, resisting roles and identities imposed on them by those in relative positions of power. The micro-level analysis of Nelson provides some insights into the ways counter-narratives are created and used by subjugated groups to organise around group characteristics (identity politics) for social change.[73]

Another seminal and broadly cited work that offers valuable insight into identifying and theorising counter-narratives is Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews’s edited volume *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense* (2004). The anthology addresses the use of counter-narratives by individuals who, as members of social groups, position their life stories in relation to master narratives. The idea of ‘counter’ implies a stance or response towards one or more narratives; as the authors contend: “[c]ounter-narratives only make sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. The very name identifies it as a positional category in tension with another category”.[74] It is thus *positionality* that characterises counter-narratives and distinguishes them from other types of intertextuality. The concept’s positionality often serves a means of criticising the norms or ideologies transmitted by master narratives, for example about gender, ethnicity, sexuality or professional status. Andrews also reminds that while counter-narratives exist in relation to master narratives, they are not necessarily dichotomous or static entities.[75]

In comparison to ‘counter-narrative’, ‘master narrative’ and related terms have been around considerably longer. The term ‘master narrative’ can be connected to such ideas as “plotlines, master-plots, dominant discourses, or simply story lines or cultural texts”.[76] Master narratives include shared understandings of people and events, guiding action and decisions in everyday life. They often depart from dominant modes of viewing and explaining the world, marginalising or excluding perspectives that diverge from them.[77] For Andrews, the power of master narratives derives from their internalisation: “we become the stories we know, and the

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[73] Ryan (2004, p. 253).

[74] Bamberg & Andrews (2004, p. x).

[75] Andrews (2004, p. 2).

[76] Talbot et al. (1996, p. 225).

[77] Bamberg (2005, p. 287).

master narrative is reproduced".[78] Central to discussions around master and counter-narratives is how individuals can resort to and corroborate, but also resist and subvert, socio-culturally dominant master narratives. Bamberg points out that "[o]f particular relevance is the problem of resources that enable the individual subject to draw up positioning strategies that contribute and ultimately lead to (historical) change".[79] Considered against this background, Bamberg brings forth the topic of counter-narratives as "extremely relevant" since, they bring narrative research closer to the field of practical applications and provide opportunities for using narrative research in the service of a "liberating and emancipating agenda".[80]

4.1.2. Early Applications of Counter-Narratives

The discussions around domination and marginalisation anchor the topic of counter-narratives to questions of power. To that end, narrative scholar Rimmon-Kenan has noted how 'narrative' is seen in some socio-political contexts as a "way of giving voice to minorities or disadvantaged groups, generally repressed and silenced by the hegemony".[81] According to the author, these connotations of 'narrative' are particularly prominent in feminist, post-colonial and legal studies as well as in medical humanities. Within such fields, narratives are often evoked as a 'mode of knowledge' or a 'cognitive scheme' by which we perceive and interpret the world. He further notes that such uses of narratives are often grounded in poststructuralist or constructivist world views that counter the idea of a 'single authoritative story'.[82] Similar observations are offered by sociologists Ewick and Silbey. They note how the political commitment to giving voice and bearing witness through a narrative is coupled with the epistemological claim that there is no single, objectively apprehended truth but, rather, that knowledge is socially and politically produced. The authors call these narratives that contain a possibility for unsettling power systems as 'subversive stories'. The authors contend that narratives of legal scholars have effectively transformed practices in law as well as "dominant

[78] Andrews (2004, p. 1).

[79] Bamberg (2005, p. 287).

[80] Bamberg (2004, 351).

[81] Rimmon-Kenan (2006, p. 15).

[82] Ibid. (pp. 14-15).

discursive, epistemological and political norms in the academic domain of social science and legal scholarship".[83]

American legal scholars, such as Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, have intentionally invoked narrative accounts as a vantage point to expose and critique oppressive patterns of the social world, including law. While writing subjective accounts based on everyday experiences, they have simultaneously revealed how such experiences are embedded in larger social relations and cultural processes.[84] Richard Delgado has characterised such scholars' perspective in the following way: "Many, but by no means all, who have been telling legal stories are members of what could be loosely described as outgroups, groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized."[85] Delgado and Stefancic note that these 'new legal storytellers' draw on a long tradition of narratives told by oppressed groups to preserve their culture and criticise illegitimate authority.[86]

It is probably not surprising that counter-narratives have developed particular currency within critical legal studies. In their work on narrative ethnography, Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein have pointed towards the relevance of institutional environments. The authors suggest reading narratives as social practices embedded in institutional contexts, rather than as separate texts.[87] By controlling the production, reception and maintenance of narratives, institutional settings can function as key sites of master narratives.[88] In other instances, narrative control may be hardly visible. It exists in the conventions and preferred discursive regimes within the institution, and in its most taken-for-granted aspects.[89] The narrative appears as if 'telling itself', disguising its ideological content under seemingly 'neutral' and 'universal' discourses. As discussed above, these master narratives may be perceived with particular clarity by those who are excluded from them.

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[83] Ewick & Silbey (1995, p. 205).

[84] Ibid. (pp. 198, 203).

[85] Delgado (1989, p. 2412).

[86] Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 39).

[87] Ewick & Silbey (1995).

[88] Gubrium & Holstein (2008, pp. 260).

[89] Ibid (pp. 256-257).

4.1.3. Source of Socially Conscious Research Methodology

Besides law, counter-narrative methodological approach has been received with enthusiasm in educational settings, particularly in education research influenced by critical race theory and related fields. By giving a voice to and centering the experiences of marginalised communities, counter-narrative offers a means of disrupting 'deficit narratives' about students of colour (e.g., on the curriculum) and countering colourblindness in educational institutions. In this vein, it has been regarded as a promising tool to stimulate educational equity.[90] This discussion provides valuable insights into framing counter-narrative as a research methodology. Besides the seminal works of critical legal scholars, the contributions of Solórzano and Yosso have been highly influential within the field. The authors present critical race methodology and discuss how it generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized and silenced. They explain how the composition of counter-narratives (or 'counter-stories') grounded in the perspectives and knowledge of people of colour can be used as a "theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tool to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work towards social justice".[91] According to the authors, such a methodology draws "explicitly on the lived experiences of people of color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives".[92]

Scholars who incorporate Solórzano and Yosso's critical race methodology tend to use standard qualitative methods for data collection, typically by combining semistructured interviews with field observations. In their comprehensive review, Miller et al. identify two principal ways that scholars can use counter-narratives as a method. First, they may elicit narratives from research participants that are conceived of by either the participants or the researchers (or both) as counter to majoritarian narratives.[93] Scholars may thus invoke narratives as a 'mode of observation', or a 'vantage point' from which to examine certain aspects of social life (e.g., experiences of discrimination or race consciousness), for example,

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[90] Miller et al. (2020).

[91] Solórzano & Yosso (2002, p. 23).

[92] Ibid. (p. 26).

[93] Miller et al. (2020, pp. 277-279).

through thematic analysis.[94] Secondly, the researchers may collect data from various sources and elicit participant narratives as one type of data. The researchers then construct a counter-narrative based on the experiences of the participants and the researchers themselves. They may also occasionally adopt first-person narratives to construct their own counter-narratives.[95] Counter-narratives serve as a research tool that allows researchers to use their own experiential knowledge (e.g., as women of colour) to interpret and criticise some aspects of the social world.[96]

4.2. Intersectionality

This thesis uses intersectionality as an analytical tool to examine the content of counter-narratives discussed in the previous sections. Rather than a grand theory, intersectionality can be conceptualised as an "overarching knowledge project" responding to complex social inequalities.[97] It has been adopted as the primary analytic tool that feminist and antiracist scholars use to analyse identity and systems of oppression/privilege.[98] Within feminist theory, intersectionality refers broadly to "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power".[99] The processes of co-production and simultaneous impact are particularly important to intersectionality theorists.[100] The term intersectionality originally emerged in critical legal studies in the 1990s, yet the topics that it covered were mainly developed in the black women's movement. Therefore, I would like to stress that intersectionality and black feminism are interconnected knowledge projects.

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[94] Ewick & Silbey (1995, pp. 202-203).

[95] Miller et al. (2020, p. 278).

[96] Garcia et al. (2020, p. 1483).

[97] Collins (2015, p. 5).

[98] Nash (2008, p. 1).

[99] Davis (2008, p. 68).

[100] Lykke (2011, pp. 208-209).

4.2.1. The Concept of Intersectionality

The term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced by American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Her seminal articles have attained close to canonical status in the intersectionality literature.[101] Crenshaw offered intersectionality in 1989 as a metaphor to illustrate intersecting categories of discrimination. With the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw challenged the law to alter its doctrinal structure to attend to black women’s particular experiences of employment discrimination. Because the existing legal apparatus recognised only race- or gender-based injuries, it failed to capture and remedy black women’s concrete experiences that were shaped by the intersection between two dimensions of inequality.[102] In 1991, Crenshaw offered a threefold definition of intersectionality, including structural, political and representational intersectionality. She showed how women of colour were particularly vulnerable to battering and rape (structural intersectionality) and how both feminism and antiracism failed to address these issues; the former due to racial normativity and the latter due to gender normativity (failure of political intersectionality). Representational intersectionality, in turn, concerns the sexist and racist ways in which women of color are portrayed in the media representations and narratives, perpetuating their objectification.[103]

Within feminist theory, tracing intersectionality’s origins to Crenshaw has been problematised. Patricia Hill Collins, for instance, has criticised the narratives that take Crenshaw, or even the academia, as a starting point for discussion, claiming that they tend to obscure the analytic’s true origins that lie within social movements of black women.[104] Mapping intersectionality’s changing contours, the Collins underscores the concept’s long history in black feminism. In her view, the concept that was ‘coined’ by Crenshaw signified simply a process of legitimisation for what had been previously grouped under the rubric of

[101] Crenshaw (1989; 1991).

[102] Crenshaw (1989, p. 140).

[103] Crenshaw (1991, p. 1283).

[104] Collins (2017, pp. 10-11). Crenshaw herself identifies as a black feminist and brings forth her familiarity with the social justice work carried out by social movements. However, she was not an activist in such movements.

race/class/gender studies.[105] Other scholars have also pointed out how the topics unfolding under ‘intersectionality’ had already been discussed over the previous decades under similar notions, such as ‘double jeopardy’ (Frances Beal), ’multiple jeopardy’ (Deborah King), and ‘interlocking oppressions’ (Combahee River Collective).[106] These terms may indeed be understood as forerunners of the concept of intersectionality, grounding the debate that was taken up after Crenshaw’s intervention.[107] Besides the analogy to crossroads, feminist theorists have also proposed other ways of conceptualising intersectionality, for example as an ‘axis’ of difference (Nira Yuval-Davis) and as a ‘dynamic process’ (Dorthe Staunæs).[108]

There are also others who criticise the US-centrism of the discussion. In Britain, for instance, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis had already discussed the notion of multiple systems of oppression in the 1980s.[109] Stuart Hall also analysed complex social inequalities of class, nation, race and ethnicity in relation to immigrant experiences and British multiculturalism in his pioneering work with cultural studies.[110] Furthermore, it has been argued that emphasising Anglo-American feminist theory has tended to obscure how similar discussions are explored within Afro-Latin American and the Caribbean contexts.[111] For instance, Brazilian black feminists have pushed on an intersectional knowledge project without necessarily claiming the term ‘intersectionality’.[112] This observation also applies to the research context of this thesis in which words such as ‘diversity’ are often used in place of intersectionality. Language might be part of the explanation: Lutz et al. have noted that the concept of intersectionality has been received faster in countries where the English-language literature is more widely read.[113] Particularly referring to the Brazilian context, Collins has noted that some black

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[105] Ibid. (p. 6). Collins argues that Crenshaw based the concept of intersectionality on the ideas of the Combahee River Collective, conceiving it as part of a social justice project rather than a theoretical concept per se. In Collin’s view, the Crenshaw’s intervention in the 1990s marks the institutionalisation of the concept, distancing it from the social movements of the previous decades. Furthermore, it marked the separation between intersectionality as an emancipatory knowledge project and intersectionality as a praxis and an emancipatory political project (Ibid, p. 12).

[106] Carastathis (2014, p. 304); Davis (2008, pp. 70-71).

[107] Lutz et al. (2011, p. 4).

[108] Davis (2008, p. 68).

[109] Carastathis (2014, p. 312).

[110] Collins (2015, p. 7).

[111] Akotirene (2019, p. 50).

[112] Collins (2015, p. 15).

[113] Lutz et al. (2011, p. 6).

feminists may hesitate to appropriate the term ‘intersectionality’ due to its hegemonic connotation as an institutionalised knowledge project of (white) feminist theory.[114] Thus, contextualising the term is important since, as Carastathis has argued, “some deployments of intersectionality may serve to obscure and reproduce the very phenomena intersectionality was conceived to illuminate and overcome”.[115]

4.2.2. Intersectionality as an Analytical Tool

While the ideas behind the term ‘intersectionality’ may not have been new, its conceptualisation offered a novel link between two distinct approaches: the critical feminist theory on race/gender/class and a critical methodology inspired by postmodern feminist theory.[116] While the two approaches shared many of the same concerns, they also had considerable differences. Critical feminist theorists of race/gender/class were motivated by women’s concrete political struggles. Postmodern feminist theorists, in turn, were inspired by the post-structuralist project of deconstructing master categories. According to Davis, intersectionality provided “the basis for a mutually beneficial collaboration” between the two projects that were previously seen as incompatible; it offered political credibility to poststructuralist feminist theorists and a theoretically sophisticated methodology to the race/class/gender feminists. As mentioned previously, intersectionality has become the predominant tool in analysing systems of oppression and multiple identities in feminist scholarship.

At least four main benefits have been attributed to the concept of intersectionality: inclusivity, simultaneity, complexity and irreducibility.[117] Intersectionality has been considered to act as a corrective against the legacy of exclusions within white Western feminism.[118] In specific, it promises to address the “most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist

[114] Collins (2015, p. 15).
[115] Carastathis (2014, p. 312).
[116] Collins (2017, p. 17); Davis (2008, p. 74).
[117] Carastathis (2014).
[118] Ibid. (p. 309).

scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women".[119] To that end, the paradigm rejects the 'single-axis framework' that underlies the history of both feminist and anti-racist scholarship. Intersectionality theorists have argued that mono-system analyses that privilege of one foundational explanatory category (e.g., gender) to explain inequality or lived experience are inevitably reductive and fail to capture the complexity of social structures. Instead, they underscore how oppression is produced through the interaction of multiple and co-constitutive axes (e.g., social formations of patriarchy, capitalism and heterosexism acting simultaneously) and that these structures must be given equal explanatory salience in intersectional inquiry.[120]

Intersectionality introduces a greater level of complexity into the analysis. Black and other minority ethnic feminists have commonly perceived race, gender and class to be the 'three major social divisions'.[121] Besides these, feminist theorists have also added other dimensions, such as age, disability and sexuality. For many feminist theorists, the open-ended nature of intersectional analysis is a strength; it challenges the analyst's to go beyond the first 'evident' focus and to remain sensitive to omissions and exclusions.[122] However, when new components are added into the analysis, one must also be mindful of not reducing complexity into unitary categories or a cumulative model (e.g. race + gender + sexuality + class = complex identity).[123] As Yuval-Davis has explained, "[t]he point of intersectional analysis is not to find several identities under one" since this would "reinscribe the fragmented, additive model of oppression and essentialize specific social identities."[124] In other words, intersectionality rejects approaches that present identity or oppression as a sum of its (devisable) parts.

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[119] Davis (2008, p. 72).

[120] Carastathis (2014, pp. 307-308). Carastathis notes that some scholars use the word 'interlocking' rather than 'intersecting' to describe how social structures of oppression converge and co-constitute each other. For instance, Sherene Razack makes an analytical distinction between the two stressing that 'interlocking' systems "need one another", whereas 'intersecting' refers to "discrete systems whose paths cross". However, Carastathis contends that the distinction currently lacks supported arguments in the literature as well as a theoretical basis to sustain. (Ibid, p. 310).

[121] Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 201).

[122] Davis (2008); Lutz et al. (2011); Lykke (2011).

[123] Nash (2008, p. 6).

[124] Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 205).

Intersectionality theorists are also faced with a number of challenges. One frequently raised question is the definitional problem of which categories are made salient and why particular differences are given recognition while others are not.[125] In respect to relativist concerns where 'anything goes' and there is a danger of neglecting categories that 'actually matter', Yuval-Davis reminds us of the importance of conducting contextual analysis: "in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positionings".[126] The investigation of specific social, political and economic processes is equally important when analysing 'the classic triad' of race, gender and class. Although different 'axes of power' tend to concentrate in specific social locations, such constellations do not have consistent or unchanging contours, but they are historically specific.[127] Furthermore, Nina Lykke has criticised the shallowness of intersectional inquiry, emphasising the need to ask fundamental questions such as "'what is class?', 'what is race?', 'what is gender?' and how do they intra-act on a micro- and a macrosocial level?'"[128] These questions are important particularly when analysing a research context that differs considerably from that of the analyst, such as in my case.

4.2.3. Approaches to Social Categories

Even though the paradigm of intersectionality has been eagerly adopted in various disciplines, it does not provide methodological guidelines that would fit all kinds of research.[129] In this vein, the taxonomy of Leslie McCall becomes useful. She has identified three methodological approaches of intersectional categorisation: *anticategorical*, *intracategorical* and *intercategorical complexity*. Each approach responds in a somewhat distinct manner to the necessity of managing "…the complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to

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[125] Carastathis (2014, p. 309).

[126] Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 203). The author explains that there are some social divisions, like gender, that have a tendency to "shape most people's lives in most social locations". Some other social divisions may be more closely connected to a particular location, social setting or a situation affecting fewer people on a global scale. Examples of such divisions are an individual's membership to a particular caste or her status as a refugee.

[127] Ibid. (p. 200).

[128] Lykke (2011, p. 210).

[129] Davis (2008, p. 79).

include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis".[130] I situate the research approach of this thesis under the *intracategorical* approach, drawing inspiration from Finnish researcher Sarri Vuorisalo-Tiitinen who has examined the identity of indigenous women of the Mexican Zapatist movement.[131] I agree her on that "social categories are not only restrictive but also provide for empowering narrative resources".[132] I will first present the other two approaches briefly and then extend the discussion on the *intracategorical* approach.

As the term implies, *anticategorical complexity* includes a sceptical stance towards using categories. Anticategoricalists consider categories as 'social fictions' that produce inequalities by imposing a stable and homogenising order on shifting and multiple social identities. In this vein, scholars seek to deconstruct master categories (e.g., race, class, sexuality and gender) and the normative assumptions underlying them. The third approach, *intercategorical complexity* (also referred to as the *categorical approach*), uses categories strategically in research by adopting them provisionally. It is not so much interested in definitions or representations of groups as it is interested in structural relationships. Inequalities are treated as a hypothesis, and changing relationships among multiple social groups are investigated empirically. Scholars often use advanced quantitative techniques and large data sets that they compare systematically.[133]

The *intracategorical* approach – the one used in this thesis – focuses on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experiences within such groups. This approach inaugurated the study of intersectionality. It originated in the early narrative essays and their theoretical interventions that defined the field. Intracategorical analysists often examine personal narratives and conduct single-group studies that focus on a new (new in the sense that they have been defined as a result of deconstructing a master category) or invisible group. Scholars can use the case study method for the analysis of a social location and proceed to uncover the complexities of an experience

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[130] McCall (2005, p. 1772).

[131] Vuorisalo-Tiitinen (2016). Vuorisalo-Tiitinen examines the speech of Esther, one of the leaders of the Mexican Zapatist movement. She combines the methodologies of intersectional feminism and critical discourse analysis (CDA), classifying her research under the methodology of the *intracategorical* approach.

[132] Ibid. (p. 126).

[133] McCall. (2005, pp. 1773, 1791).

embodied in such a location.[134] The complexity is managed by analysing "the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories, rather than at the intersection of the full range of dimensions of a full range of categories".[135] The *intracategorical* approach begins with a "unified intersectional core"; with a single social group rather than with several groups, and "works its way outward to analytically unravel one by one the influences of gender, race, class, and so on."[136] The method of the *intracategorical approach* is single-case intensive rather than systematically comparative. Comparisons are often carried about in relation to more standard groups, which often appear in research as contextual information. This thesis focuses on low-income black women.

While both the *anticategorical* approach (used by feminist theorists inspired by postmodern theoretical perspectives) and the *intracategorical* approach (used by feminist theorists of race/ class/gender motivated by contemporary feminist politics) are critical towards categories, their stances differ drastically. As McCall contends, instead of seeking to eliminate categories, the latter group is critical of "broad and sweeping acts" of categorization rather than critical of categorization *per se*.[137] For instance, Crenshaw argues that the problem is not the existence of categories (being simply a linguistic of philosophical issue), but rather "the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies". Crenshaw acknowledges the importance of identity politics in specific historical contexts. In her view, the most critical resistance strategy for disempowered groups is to defend the politics of a social location rather that to destroy it. Such resistance may include confronting the content of categories (e.g., 'queer') and transforming narratives discourses of self-identification (e.g., 'black is beautiful').[138] In sum, the intracategorical approach underscores the fact that intersectionality does demand the naming of categories.

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[134] Ibid. (pp. 1774, 1782).

[135] Ibid. (p. 1781).

[136] Ibid. (p. 1787).

[137] Ibid. (p. 1779).

[138] Crenshaw (1991, p. 1297).

5 Analysis

5. Analysis

5.1. ‘Cria da Maré’: A Voice from the Margins

The introductory sentence on the official website of Marielle Franco emphatically defines her standpoint and shows how she wished to be recognised: “I am a black woman, mother and from the favela of Maré”.[139] The latter is a translation of her expression ‘cria da Maré’. The word ‘cria’ is slang used in Rio’s favelas, referring to a person who was born and raised in a certain favela territory.[140] In this first part of the analysis, I will examine this standpoint of Marielle by focusing on the aspect of the favela. I will analyse her personal narratives and discuss their main topics: early motherhood, economic precarity, education and human rights activism. All these aspects are central to Marielle’s political career, and as it will be shown later in the analysis, grounded her actions as a councillor. By following the feminist understanding – ‘personal is political’ – Marielle translated her and her peers’ experiences into political demands. Her self-reflexive narratives offer insights into how she understood her position at the intersection of multiple oppressions; namely, those related to gender, race, class and cultural identity, and how she overcame them. In this first part of the analysis, I will also demonstrate that Marielle was trained to perceive social differences: she was a sociologist and came to thematise the question of the favela in her scholarly work.

5.1.1. Early Motherhood and Economic Precarity

An interview with Marielle Franco sees her recount the journey from the favela of Maré to the parliament, providing us with her ‘origin story’ and offering a way into understanding her use of a narrative. My decision to use this interview as a starting point for the analysis is based on its particular framing: The 35-minute piece was recorded by a couple of black women, Mayara Christina and Yasmin Falcão, on July 25, the International Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women’s Day. It was published on August 1, 2017, in two parts on their

[139] www.mariellefranco.com.br.

[140] Amora & Gomes (n. d.).

YouTube channel ‘Marias do Brejo’.[141] The interview has reached a wide audience: By October 2020, the first part has been viewed over 57,000 times and the second has in excess of 17,500 views. Marielle was clearly an important role model for the two young women interviewing her. The caption for the video effectively conveys its spirit:

> *July 25 passed and there’s nothing better to do than to celebrate it by telling the story of a black woman from the favela and COUNCILLOR OF RIO DE JANEIRO! Marias had a chat with Marielle Franco and it was empowering to get to know her story. Tell us what you think. Who are the black Latin American or Caribbean women that inspire you?*[142]

Upon request to “tell her story from the favela of Maré to the parliament”, Marielle begins with the favela, and describes her lived experience as a young favela resident. This section is structured around this topic. In order to gain understanding of her background, I will recount some parts of Marielle’s narrative and contextualise them in relation to the favela of Maré.

Marielle was born (July 25, 1979) and raised in *Complexo da Maré*, in the north of Rio de Janeiro. The neighbourhood has the population of a small city; a total of 140,000 residents.The number accounts for 9% of all favela residents in Rio.[143] The first residents moved to the area in the 1930s. Situated on the edge of Guanabara Bay, the area was initially covered by vast wetlands. In the interview, Marielle states that her paternal grandfather was one of the first residents, when most of the dwellings were precarious stilt houses built as protection against flooding. The swamplands were gradually drained, and now only the name ‘Maré’ (‘tide’ in English) reminds of these times. The region was inhabited from the 1940s onward, and the construction of the main highway *Avenida Brasil* was fundamental to the emergence of *Complexo da Maré*.[144] I have previously discussed that the expansion of the favelas was related to the mass migration from the northeast to rapidly urbanising southeastern cities (see section 2.2). The parents of Marielle also are northeasterners, descendants of Paraiba.[145]

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[141] A rough translation could be ‘Women from Nowhere’.

[142] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a; 2017b).

[143] The favela complex has twice as many residents as Rocinha, which is considered the most populous favela of Brazil with 70,000 residents (Redes da Maré 2019, pp. 18-19).

[144] Souza e Silva (2013, p. 22).

[145] Amora & Gomes (n. d.).

The favelas and urban peripheries of Brazilian cities are characteristically young, and Maré is no exception. The majority of its population is under 30 years old.[146] Marielle's adolescence was typical of the youth living in the favelas: she spent her time playing with other children on the streets and abiding by the home rules. Marielle came to live in various communities within the vast district, residing in *Conjunto Esperança*, the southernmost settlement at the margins of the highway Avenida Brasil, for most of her youth. Composed of 16 communities, *Complexo da Maré* is a vast district with internal differences between the residential areas. Some of them are informal settlements whereas others, such as *Conjunto Esperança*, were created by the government on government owned land. However, the social, educational and economic indicators of these originally official apartment complexes do not stand out significantly from the local average.[147] Marielle describes Maré, at least the part where she resided, as a primarily communal space with a residents' association, and a place where parties were held on the street. Journalist and cultural studies scholar Renata Souza[148], who also claims her identity as 'cria da Maré', has examined the local culture of Maré in her research.[149] Souza emphasises the communal spirit of the favela, and considers the shared space of the street as "fertile ground for an individuals' feeling of belongingness to the favela territory".[150] Yet she does not romanticise the favela, and recounts how sharing the common space also entails conflicts among the residents.

Marielle, like many others, had a Catholic upbringing and attended a local Catholic Church youth group.[151] In her account, she brings up the diversity within the religious groups. In particular, the progressively minded priests engaged in liberation theology offered her "a space of shelter and political thinking". She also attended Afro-Catholic mass, which is important to mention since Marielle campaigned against religious discrimination on the city

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[146] In 2013, 51.9% of the population was under 30 years old (Redes da Maré 2019, p. 28).

[147] Souza e Silva (2013, p. 21).

[148] Renata Souza was a close friend and colleague of Marielle since 2000 when they attended the same Community Preparatory School, and later the same university PUC-Rio, where Renata studied journalism. She was the first of her family to access university and now holds a PhD degree in Communication and Culture from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

[149] Souza (2018).

[150] Souza (2018, p. 59).

[151] The predominant religious groups in Maré are Catholics (47.2%) and Evangelicals (21.2%) (Redes da Maré 2019, p. 41).

council. In the interview, she describes her adolescence as having contradictory elements: while being engaged with Catholicism, – Marielle actually was a catechist for more than ten years in a local church, giving classes to children who prepared for their First Communion, – she also "escaped" to *bailes funk* by telling her mother that she was going to mass.

Bailes funk are parties organised in outdoor venues in the favelas. The predominant music style played is funk, also known as *funk carioca*, the particular style originating in Rio de Janeiro. Funk is the principal form of popular culture among favela residents. Despite the music style's increasing popularity among the middle class youth and its subsequent commercialisation, the *bailes funk* of the favelas continue to carry social stigma and the public power has traditionally tried to criminalise them.[152] Marielle combatted the criminalisation already as a parliamentary advisor (see section 5.1.4. for a discussion of her background as parliamentary advisor), contributing to the approval of the law 'Funk is Culture', which defined funk as a cultural and musical movement.[153] In her account, Marielle further explains how the engagement with the funk culture had allowed her the possibility to broaden her knowledge about the city, since as a low-income favela resident her lived experience was very much limited to within her neighbourhood.

Amidst the elements that formed the lived experience of a young favela resident, however, what most marked the life trajectory of Marielle was becoming a mother at a young age:

> *The same thing happened to me that we observe and recognise happening to others around us. I became pregnant at 18. At 19 I became a mother… It was something very impactful. (…) And like many girls who become teenage mothers, I dropped out of school.*[154]

Marielle's story is relatively common among the local adolescents. The data of the Census of Maré (2013), collected by the non-governmental organisation, Redes de Maré, show that 14.2% of the girls aged 15–19 have children. It is generally common to have children in early adulthood: 44.3% of women aged 20-24 have children, whereas the percentage of those aged

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[152] Souza (2018, pp. 116-119).

[153] Amora & Gomes (n. d.).

[154] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a).

25–29 rises to more than a half: 62.5%.[155] As implied in the above account, most teenage mothers drop out of school, which was also the case of Marielle. She had finished high school and was accepted into a course at a local Community Preparatory School, but could not take it because of the pregnancy. Marielle went back to work only three months after having had her daughter in order to be able to provide for her family. At the time, she worked as a kindergarten teacher on a minimum wage. Thus, at first, she followed a common trajectory of the women of the favela, who typically have a background of low quality of education and end up in low-paid informal jobs, repeating the cycle of poverty.

Even though *Complexo da Maré* gained an official status as a neighbourhood in 1994, this act did not bring significant changes in the material conditions of the residents who continue facing various adversities in their daily lives. The investments in healthcare, education and other public services continue to be meagre.[156] Gender inequality exacerbates this precariousness, as the role of caregiving often falls on the shoulders of women. This was also the case for Marielle. Her fight for women's rights began from her experience as a young mother within the insufficient state structure. "It is not a coincidence that we assert the labour legislation", she states, referring to low-income mothers' precarious working conditions and struggle to take care of their children. As a councillor, one of her priorities was to combat the deficit of day-care centres in the city, which is one of the most pressing concerns of low-income mothers. I will further explore the issues related to black mothers' rights in section 5.2.3.

In the above paragraphs, I have examined Marielle's narrative, which elucidates the lived experience of a favela resident from the perspective of a young woman. It also depicts the intersection of gender, age, class and territory, illustrating their simultaneous impact in the lives of young low-income mothers. Unlike many other women in her condition, Marielle managed to change the course of the events and escape the repetitive cycle of poverty that has often been the preordained destiny of Brazilian favela residents, particularly the single mothers. This brings forth a central aspect of her life trajectory: education.

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[155] Redes da Maré (2019, p. 48).

[156] According to the Social Progress Index (SPI) of 2010, Maré occupies place 137 of the 161 official neighbourhoods in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Redes da Maré 2019, p. 19).

> *It was fundamental for me to return to the Preparatory School. It was fundamental to return to the education process. I was absolutely sure that I needed to study more, to work more, to earn more in order to break away from that cycle.*[157]

Realising that her only possibility for upwards social mobility lied in education, Marielle embarked on an educational journey, which eventually took her to university.

5.1.2. From Favela to University: Class Consciousness

In 1998, Marielle had been among the first students of the Community Preparatory School of CEASM (Centre for Studies and Solidarity Actions in Maré), a civil society organization founded by current and former residents of Maré. The founders of the organisation had broken class barriers in accessing higher education institutions and gaining qualification as professors and civil servants. They decided to create the course after a study had revealed that the percentage of the residents with a higher education degree was barely over 0.5%, while the percentage of illiterates reached almost 20. Thus, it was almost 40 times more likely for a resident of Maré to have an illiterate person family member than one with a higher education diploma.[158] This also reflects the reality of how difficult it was for the Maré residents to advance socially or economically.[159] One of those who managed to do so, Jailson Souza e Silva, wrote his doctoral thesis on Maré residents' experiences within the Brazilian education system, focusing on their scholarly achievements. His study, which was later published as book, was succinctly entitled 'Why did some make it, while others did not?'.[160] In addition to the Community Preparatory School, the founders of CEASM carried out a range of projects involving education and community development.[161] With determination, Marielle managed

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[157] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a).

[158] Souza e Silva (2003, pp. 19-20).

[159] The situation has improved especially in terms of the illiteracy.The data of *Redes da Maré* shows that 37.6% of the population has completed basic education, and 18.0% have graduated from high school. The percentage of illiteracy is 6,0% among people over 15 years old and concentrated in the older segment of the population. Yet only 1.0% of the population has a degree in superior education (Redes da Maré 2019, p. 70-71).

[160] In Brazil, it was the first thesis (1997), and book (2003), written about the educational achievements of poor students within the public education system. The elaboration of Souza e Silva's thesis followed the implementation of the CEASM.

[161] The original organization is still functioning, and many other renowned organisations have grown out of it, such as the nationally renowned The Favela Observatory and *Redes de Maré*, both of which are based in Maré.

to get back on the course (which she had not been able to get on because of her pregnancy) in 2000 to 2001.

Repeatedly mentioned in her interviews, the Prep School was a space for raising consciousness among the local youth, imparting a sense of community values as well as individual possibility. In an interview conducted by *Instituto Update* for the study 'Political innovation in Latin America', Marielle recounts that the school was a key site for her political awakening:

> *I was awakened to new ways of doing politics in the Community Preparatory School. I saw myself as a resident of Maré, of 17 years, with a background of low quality education, trying to think about work. I had finished high school when I got pregnant. I realised what it was like to live as a pregnant teenager, without adequate support structures, without perspective. It beat the crap out of me! The politics comes from there. That comprehension that I either I had to change something or I was going to remain stagnant. It is about this domain of need, of emergency.*[162]

Marielle joined the small minority of Maré residents who had accessed university. In 2002, after several attempts at entrance exams, she was accepted to study social sciences in the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), one of the most prestigious private universities in Brazil. Marielle gained a full scholarship for her studies, ensured by the partnership programme between the private university of PUC and the Preparatory School. However, she needed to work simultaneously with her studies – not at all common among the middle-class university students in Brazil. At the time, Marielle's life was divided between her work place in Maré, the same institution where she had taken the college preparatory course, and the university located in Gàvea, considered a high-income neighbourhood in the south of Rio de Janeiro. Her daily routine was hectic: she would often leave home early in the morning, work until noon, attend lectures in the afternoon, sometimes teaching a class in the evening, and return to Maré at midnight.[163] Her self-reflexive narratives depict her difficult navigation through these socially, culturally and geographically distinct spaces. While creating a network of respectful relationships in the university, she also had to argue a lot with the teachers to be able to meet the demands. This was the survival strategy of a young black

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[162] Instituto Update (2018/2019).

[163] TV PUC-Rio (2018).

mother to be able to maintain herself in the university (see section 2.1., in which I discussed challenges faced by black students).

When Marielle enrolled at the university in 2002, she was already some years older than the rest of the class, and a mother of a young child. She emphasised the differences between herself and her peers at the private university of PUC:

> *I arrived at the PUC feeling very defensive: with this attitude of a* favelada*, of a* mareense*. I really denied this thing of the* patricinhas*, of the* mauricinhos *of the PUC. Because it was in fact a whole different class, a whole other income. But I learned, and I'm happy [that I learned] and hope that people will learn to deal with diversity [in spite of class differences].*[164]

Class differences feature in Marielle's accounts, most saliently in her succinct analysis of some other students' wealth and social status. The informal expressions *patricinha* and *mauricinho* refer to adolescents or young adults who wish to stand out for their consumerist habitus, typically the children of high-income parents. They are slightly pejorative terms and can be associated with adjectives such as 'spoilt' and 'pompous'. Not by chance, Marielle's Bachelor's thesis examined income differences.[165] Marielle states that she "denied" the world of the middle and upper classes and asserted her identity as a *favelada* and *mareense*.[166] Thus, she did not try to hide her class status and background as a favela resident as she navigated through the bourgeois milieu of the university. This perceived social divide between her and her university peers lessened over the years, as she describes it in her account. Furthermore, despite her affirmative identity, Marielle also had the characteristic of being very open to meeting and discussing with people different from her. She did not want to isolate herself in a single group.[167]

Marielle graduated with a bachelor's degree in social sciences from the PUC in 2007, and in with a master's degree in public administration from the Federal Fluminense University (FFU) in 2014. At the time Marielle's main objective was to become a researcher.[168] As it was

[164] Ibid.

[165] Cravo & da Silva (2019, pp. 203-204).

[166] The term *mareense* refers to a local identity of those who reside in Maré.

[167] Cravo & da Silva (2019, pp. 200-201).

[168] Ibid. (p. 197).

for many underprivileged students, family support was important. In the acknowledgements of her Master's thesis[169], Marielle thanks her family for ensuring her the "education that was possible", and for always motivating her to study and aim high in her objectives. She stated: "Since, for a *favelada* to ascend on the social ladder, in addition to taking the elevator, she must make a great effort", referring to the barriers which she had had to overcome.[170] The attitudes towards education instilled by her parents provided a fruitful soil for her career despite many challenges. Yet, Marielle's trajectory of upward mobility resists to be read as a story about an individual's scholarly triumphs, as a meritocratic narrative often frames such life trajectories. The way in which Marielle always situates her narrative in relation to social structures and emphasises the role of her community speaks against such readings.

Furthermore, both Marielle Franco and Renata Souza liked to be recognised as 'organic intellectuals', which speaks to their commitment towards their place of origin as well as to their class consciousness. An organic intellectual, as conceived by Antonio Gramsci, refers to intellectuals whose concerns are grounded in everyday life and who actively participate in counter-hegemonic practices that would subvert existing social relations and the 'common sense' which supports such relations. This type of intellectual contrasts with traditional intellectuals who consider themselves independent of particular social groups and their interests.[171] In her Master's thesis, Marielle applies this title to the "intellectuals of the favela"; the generation of students who entered the university through the Community Prep School of Maré.[172] In the same vein, Souza associates the meaning of 'organic intellectual' to residents of Maré who reflect on social inequalities and promote social transformation:

> *It should be noted that the "organic intellectual" acts in the political formulation of strategies that can either maintain the hegemony of the powerful or decimate it by means of counter-hegemonic practices. In the case of* mareenses, *this organicity is committed to political and social change, making it counter-hegemonic*.[173]

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[169] Marielle wrote her Master's thesis on the public security of Rio de Janeiro, entitled "UPP – The Decline of the Favela in Three Letters: An Analysis of Public Security Policy in the State of Rio de Janeiro" (2014). The thesis is for her Master's degree in Public Administration from the Postgraduate Program in Administration at the Faculty of Administration, Accounting Sciences and Tourism (UFF), where she studied between 2012 and 2014.

[170] Franco (2014/2018).

[171] See Williams (2005).

[172] Franco (2014/2018, pp. 17-18).

[173] Souza (2018 pp. 161-162).

The organic intellectuals hold that once the resident of favela comes to understand oneself as a *favelada*, recognising her position in the unequal society, she can reclaim her agency and promote social and political change in her community.[174] The next section will explore how this standpoint allows for contesting stigmatising master narratives about the favelas.

5.1.3. Contesting Master Narratives about the Favela

As described above, the PUC had a consolidated scholarships policy for students from communities in the state of Rio de Janeiro, such as the partnership programme between the CEASM. Affirmative-action policies installed in both private and public universities have increased the number of low-income students, including favela residents, in universities across Brazil (see section 2.1). This has also changed the landscape in which, for a long time, the middle class and the dominant segments could speak for the favela residents. Jailson Souza e Silva, the sociologist from Maré cited above, states:

> *It is not that the middle-class, the wealthier people, cannot effectively talk about the poor and poverty, but it is very different in terms of legitimacy when the favela residents themselves gain the theoretical tools and accumulate intellectual capacities to talk about their own issues.*[175]

It is noteworthy that Souza e Silva has worked specifically with counter-narrative methodology to disrupt dominant narratives and ‘deficit narratives’ about the favela (see section 4.1.3., in which I discussed how counter-narrative offers a means of disrupting ‘deficit narratives’ about students of colour). He calls them ‘discourses of absence’ (Br. ‘discursos de ausência’). Souza e Silva explains that the favela territories and their residents are evaluated according to the parameters of other social groups, i.e, those who do not live in a favela, and typically define the favelas by what their inhabitants “do not have”. These types of discourses often entail judgements about the favela residents, thus perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes about the low-income sectors of the society.[176] As further remarked by the scholar,

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[174] Ibid. (p. 14).

[175] Souza e Silva (2017).

[176] Souza e Silva (2003, p. 15).

the ‘deficit narratives’ about these spaces support both the conservative/criminalising view and also the paternalistic stance taken by progressive sectors. While the progressive sectors express solidarity towards low-income groups, they often end up presenting them as “passive victims of a monolithic social system, which they would not be able to understand and change”.[177] To counter the ‘deficit narratives’ about the favelas, Souza e Silva asserts the concept of favelas based on potential. It is the rationale behind constructing counter-narratives that, rather than idealising the favelas, aim at representing these in their complexity, including their own symbolic and material references, forms of sociability, inventions and constructions that people produce in the favelas.[178]

The conceptual associations between favela, poverty and criminality have contributed to widespread prejudices and discrimination against favela residents. Leonardo Custódio, who has written about counter-publics in Rio’s favelas, contends that “[o]ne cannot deny that favelas suffer from high crime rates and low-quality public services (…) However, defining favelas exclusively by the lacks, threats and stereotypes associated with them is an exercise in reductionism that reinforces rather than challenges prejudices”.[179] As a favela resident herself, Marielle was very much aware of the negative stereotypes associated with the favelas. Her account implies that she encountered such stereotypes also within the PUC university:

> *[I would] also speak out like this way: “Ok, if you want to know about violence, come to Maré with me”. So, there were some things that were very spontaneous, but I tried hard to bring out that reality which was often posed only in a derogatory manner. Either it was a place of bandits, something completely stereotyped, or then it was romanticised. (…) So, I wanted to be referred to, I wanted to be identified. I was already working… I was already in other favelas. So, I wanted to bring that out.*[180]

In her account, Marielle illustrates her attempts at disrupting the stereotypes about the favelas, on the one hand, as “only the place of bandits”, and on the other, as something “romanticised”. Whereas the former carries the stigmatising narrative of the hegemonic media, the latter possibly refers to the imagination of those who reject the stigmatised view of

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[177] Ibid. (p. 23).

[178] Ibid.

[179] Custódio (2016, p. 59).

[180] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a).

the master narrative, but also do not have experience of their lived reality of the favela residents. Marielle describes calling out to other students to see for themselves how it is like in a favela. Being a favela dweller within the academic world might have ensured Marielle a certain kind of legitimacy to speak about this topic.[181] Conscious of how prejudices end up influencing public policies directed at the favelas, Marielle Franco, Renata Souza and many other Maré residents came to thematise the favela in their research, as I have previously demonstrated. Souza, for instance, emphasises the importance of "producing a counter-position that is capable of re-signifying the term favela".[182] As the stigmatised deployments of the concept exact an immense toll on the residents of the favelas, many of whom pay with their lives, charting the meaning of favela in new ways is considered as a matter of survival for its residents. For Souza, the identity of *favelado* is intimately connected with the idea of resistance.[183] This entails human rights activism:

> *Claiming the position of* favelado *is connected to the struggle for the right to life. This is because the prejudice against the favela is reflected in a public security policy that does not advocate the preservation of people's lives. That is why you do not live in the favela, you survive.*[184]

In the following section, I will discuss the context of human rights violations in urban peripheries and favelas and examine how Marielle frames women as front-line activists within such spaces.

5.1.4. Activism of Black Women

The early 2000s saw an increase in the pressure of militarisation in Maré. Marielle often mentions that her activism for human rights in the favela was animated in 2005 by the loss of her friend Jaqueline, a colleague at the Communitarian Preparatory School of Maré, who had gone on to study Economics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Jaqueline died in a

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[181] Souza (2018, p. 14).

[182] Ibid. (p. 16).

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid (p. 15).

shootout close to Marielle's grandfather's house, a location which is notorious for conflicts between the police and armed civil groups linked to drug trafficking.

> *When Jaqueline died, we asked ourselves: "Could it have been me?" We campaigned against police tanks and started to understand this debate about public security, [the topic] which I have been working on over time. It was like this: "How is it possible for a vehicle to enter and start shooting and killing people, no matter what the protection it gives to the police is? How was this possible?"*[185]

The spot where Jaqueline died of a stray bullet has become symbolic of the cruelty attached to the prevailing public security policy. In 2008, an eight-year-old boy, Matéus, was shot in broad daylight by the police in the same place. He was found with a one-real coin in his hand; his mother had asked him to go buy bread. The experience of loss recurs across the activist trajectories in Maré. Take Renata Souza, for instance, who was drawn to activism by similar circumstances. The state deputy's biography relates the incident that initially sparked a debate on public security for her:

> *In October 2006, after the murder of the three-year-old Renan da Costa, son of her ex-sister-in-law, Renata Souza's militancy took on a new meaning in her life. The boy's death was the necessary trigger for the agenda of Public Security to gain centrality in the actions of the young resident of Maré who became even more involved in social movements and their struggle for the right to life because of this event.*[186]

Amidst this intensified militarisation, local history teacher and activist for human rights, Marcelo Freixo (PSOL-RJ) was campaigning for The Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ). Freixo was a member of *Justiça Global*, a human rights NGO, before being elected to ALERJ in 2006. Marielle, Renata and other activists joined his campaign in the district of Maré. When Freixo was elected, he asked the activist group to choose two names that would compose a team centered on the issues of the favela. Thus, Marielle and Renata were invited to participate in his office as parliamentary advisors and came to work with the deputy for ten years, until the election of Marielle in 2016. Marcelo Freixo assumed the chairmanship of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission in 2009, and it was headed by him until 2018. Marielle came to be appointed as one of the coordinators of the

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[185] Instituto Update (2018/2019).

[186] www.alerj.rj.gov.br (n. d.).

Commission. In the Human Rights Commission, she attended to the victims of human rights violations, mainly mothers who had lost their family members to state violence, also including wives of the police officers who had been killed on duty. According to Mônica Fransisco[187], a former cabinet member of Marielle, it did not take long for Marielle to turn into an important reference for community leaders across Rio de Janeiro.[188]

As discussed in section 2.2., human rights violations typically occur in militarised areas in poor urban neighbourhoods, favelas in particular. The great majority of the victims of state violence are young black men. The profile of murdered police officers is similar: black and of low-income background.[189] Negligence during police investigations is a common occurrence, and most crimes committed by state agents and remain unpunished.[190] The operational mode of the military police has gained unofficial legitimacy to use excessive force, reducing the pressure to hold guilty parties responsible.[191] Consequently, the mothers have to fight for the resolution of the crimes to which their family members fall victim. In addition to this, the mothers must also fight against the prejudiced media narratives, which blame the victims by attaching the stigma of criminals in a homogenous way.

Neglected by the state and excluded from the ‘category of citizens’, black mothers have organised themselves in collectives based on solidarity to demand access to justice and truth. This can be understood as a resistance strategy against the black genocide in the Brazilian favelas. It is often described how such groups of mothers aim to ‘transform their personal pain into a public cause’ (Br. ’transformar luto em luta’) so that the state violence would be made visible and so that their children’s stories would not be forgotten.[192] Renata Souza explains how the topic of public security is closely connected to the question of black mothers’ rights. Due to the workings of ‘patriarchal machismo’, black women must assume the role of the primary caretakers of their children. They even need to put their lives at risk to protect their

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[187] Mônica Fransisco is social scientist, priest, a community leader of the favela of Borel, and the current state deputy of Rio de Janeiro (PSOL-RJ).

[188] Franco (2014/2018).

[189] Freixo (2019).

[190] Werneck & Iraci (2016, p. 19).

[191] Assumpção et al. (2018, p.131).

[192] Ibid. (pp. 139, 141).

family members from the bullets fired either by state agents or drug trafficking gangs. Souza explains that these mothers are often the only ones "who have the strength and legitimacy to beg for the lives of their children when armed civil groups threaten their lives by summary execution".[193] In her 2017 article, Marielle describes how these black women "stand out and transcend, both by means of their actions and representations, the environment that predominates in their lives", certainly theorising her experience as well.[194]

> *In the case of these women who live in peripheral regions, especially in the case of the largest group that inhabits these areas – of black women (black and brown or mixed race) – , their self-driven courses of action are marked by a primary survival instinct (their own survival and their families'). In this sense, they are organised in relations of solidarity for the maintenance of life and for amplifying their dignity. On the one hand, they are the ones who suffer the greatest consequences of the dominant power established in the Brazilian society, but on the other, they are also the ones who bring about changes in their own and others' living conditions.*[195]

While recognising how black women in favelas are vulnerable to various forms of violence and oppression, Marielle frames them emphatically as agentive subjects. In her words, the women who inhabit the vast territories of urban peripheries and favelas "are not marked with neediness, as the predominant discourses of the press and hegemonic powers try to convince".[196] She thus contests the master narrative that tends to present these women as passive targets of policies and that contributes to their exclusion from public discussions concerning their lives. Marielle's framing is important for she asserts that although the activism of black women might initially be linked to overcoming the immediate conditions of their lives as favela residents, their actions can acquire dimensions that impact the whole city.[197] In the second part of my analysis, I will discuss Marielle's election and her intersectional agenda.

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[193] Souza (2018, p. 161).

[194] Franco (2017a, p. 92).

[195] Ibid. (p. 92).

[196] Ibid. (p. 91).

[197] Ibid.

5.2. From Margins to Centre: Black Feminist Politics

In the first part of the analysis, I examined the standpoint of Marielle as a favela resident. I also discussed how her political career was intimately connected to the struggles within the favela territories and showed how she deployed counter-narratives to contest the conventional discourses of these spaces. Black and low-income women were framed in her narratives as protagonists of human rights activism – Marielle herself was an example of this. In this second part of the analysis, I will explore the standpoint of Marielle as a black and intersectional feminist in institutional politics. I will start by contextualising her election onto the city council, and then discuss the aspects that grounded her political agenda. Even though Marielle ran for office only in 2016, she was already well experienced in the domain of public policy. Notably, she had worked in the Human Rights Commission of the State Legislative Assembly of Rio for nearly a decade. In addition to analysing state deputies' proposals, Marielle attended to the victims of human rights abuses, mainly black and low-income women. I will demonstrate how this work shaped her understanding of human rights. Lastly, I will discuss black feminist narratives that Marielle deployed to empower young black women to follow her example and participate in party politics.

5.2.1. 'When the Flower Cracks the Asphalt'

The 2017 article "The Emergence of Life to Overcome Social Anaesthesia in the Face of Withdrawal of Rights: The Moment of Post-Coup through the Eyes of a Black Feminist from the Favela" defines by its title the political environment in which the candidacy of Marielle Franco was charted.[198] It also highlights the black feminist gaze that informed her politics. The subtitle of Marielle's analysis, that showcases her role amidst the representative crises of 2016, is poetically incisive: 'When the Flower Cracks the Asphalt'. It squarely confronts the white patriarchal power, spelling out her attempt to transform the political institution from within:

[198] Franco (2017a).

> *Going against the current of disbelief and repetition of the same old thing in this period of coup*[199]*, other elements pulsate in the city of Rio de Janeiro with characteristics that differ from those that prevail in the national order. The historical election with 46,000 votes for a black and feminist Councilwoman from a favela, taking a left-wing political position, is a contradiction in the setting of the coup. This, in turn, speaks to the importance of occupying institutional spaces through elections and running despite the dogma of the authoritarian meritocracy in order to decenter white men taking over such spaces.*[200]

The election of Marielle with more than 46,000 votes was indeed a challenge to the local, and national, political scene dominated by white men.[201] While they comprise 22.9% of Brazil's population, white men occupy nearly 50% of the seats on the city councils across the country. Rio de Janeiro is no exception. Marielle was one among six women and the one of two black women[202] elected to the 51-seat legislature in 2016. Considering only the state capitals with 811 available seats, Marielle Franco was among the 32 black women elected.[203] The under-representation of black women is striking considering that they make up more than 25% of the population. The data of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) of Brazil show that black women represent only 5% of the total of 57,800 councillors elected in 2016. The TSE election data also show evidence of the overall under-representation of women in politics. One-fourth of the municipalities did not elect any women at all in 2016, and a third of those that did elected only one woman. The disparity is drastic, since, unsurprisingly, more than half of the population (51.0%) are women. These statistics merely capture the surface of what a solitary space municipal party politics is for women, and even more so for black women.[204]

Yet, as Marielle makes apparent in her account below, the Municipal Elections of 2016 were marked by the victories of black feminist candidates of the progressive left. In addition to Marielle, who received the fifth highest tally in Rio, Talíria Peltrone (PSOL-RJ) came first in

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[199] The term 'coup' refers to the impeachment of the President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. The term has been utilised by the sections of the political left and by various social movements.

[200] Franco (2017a, p. 94).

[201] Marielle ran against more than 23,300 candidates. The majority of the candidates were white (55.8%), whereas 29.8% declared themselves brown or mixed-race and only 14.4% black (*preto*). Two-thirds of all candidates were men (68.2%), whereas one-third were women (31.8%) (Guimarães 2020).

[202] Marielle Franco was the only black female councillor when the stricter category of black women (*preta*) is considered. If the broader, more political category of black women (*negra*; a combination of black and brown of mixed race; *parda*) is considered, Tânia Bastos (PRB-RJ), self-declaredly brown or mixed-race, is included.

[203] Gênero e Número (2018).

[204] Reis (2016).

the neighbouring municipality of Niterói with more than 5,000 votes, and Àurea Carolina (PSOL-MG) of Belo Horizonte also topped the results with more than 17,000 votes. Marielle's own understanding of how these victories were predicated on commonalities across the agendas of the three councillors heading the groundswell is insightful:

> *When there was this boom… I'm very happy to be in the Socialism and Liberty Party that elected Talíria Peltrone, the most voted-for councillor of Niterói, and also elected the most-voted for councillor, Àurea Carolina, in Belo Horizonte. The development of both social and political spaces where we have been using our slogan ever since 2016: black, feminist, and* popular[205]*, while defending lesbians and trans-identities, speaking about women of the candomblé houses[206], speaking in much broader terms about the relationship with religion and about the need for establishing social relationships that would respect differences.[207]*

Even though the newly elected black women comprised only a small minority of all councillors, their victories were by no means insignificant in the local political landscape. The resounding vote counts that ranked these women at the top of the voting lists in several cities evidenced broader changes in the society, in particular, the advances and increasing visibility of feminist movements. The late 2015 and early 2016 were marked by rallies of women across Brazilian metropolises. The mobilisations became coined as the 'Spring of Women', illustrating the force that the rallies gained in the society. The Brazilian women took to the streets to protest against cases of sexual harassment and violence and conservative politicians' attempts at further limiting their right to abortion. What was particularly remarkable about these rallies were the intensified claims to public space and political representation.[208]

In her 2018 article, Marielle describes these advances of the feminist movement and women's campaigns for more diverse political representation. In particular, she depicts how intersectional claims were gaining more visibility within the feminist movement:

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[205] The term *popular* is commonly used in Latin American countries in reference to movements or collectives of the people or popular classes, such as those connected to trade unions, rural workers associations and women's groups. (Custódio 2016, p. 26).

[206] Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion. Candomblé houses operate independently but are linked to religious communities. The religious activities take place in a *terreiro*; a sacred compound.

[207] Franco (2018b).

[208] Grillo et al. (2017).

> *It is undeniable that feminism has become more diverse, especially with the advances within terms of agendas of race, sexual orientation and gender identity, and also when it comes to reflecting on various experiences that women go through, such as motherhood.*[209]

While being in a minority, Marielle refused to be left at the margins and take office just to "fill in a quota". By this she refers to the quota law passed in 2009, which reserved a minimum of 30% and a maximum of 70% of candidacies to each gender, meant as an affirmative-action measure to tackle the under-representation of women.[210] In her article, Marielle emphasises the legacy of the previous generations that had struggled for better living conditions and for more equality in decision-making spaces, and asserts in a revolutionary tone how now there was a "fermenting march of women", who were on their way to appropriate the state machinery.[211] For Marielle, assuming the intersectional identity of a black woman from a favela meant taking on the role of the protagonist in institutional politics. She asserts a different way of 'doing politics':

> *Especially black and indigenous women have positioned themselves as an important political force on the national scene. We assume the role of pointing to what is truly the new "it" in politics: reversing the game, leaving the subaltern position in society to occupy policy making spaces, to present proposals and projects, to make decisions.*[212]

In the above paragraphs, I have contextualised the election of Marielle as a black feminist candidate. The aim of the next section is to examine Marielle's agenda and how it centered the claims of black women, sexual minorities and favela residents.

5.2.2. Agenda of a Black Woman from a Favela

In a 2016 campaign video produced by the platform 'City Councillors that We Want', we hear Marielle recounting the priorities of her candidacy. The video conveys her own understanding of how her agenda ought to be comprised in intersectional terms:

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[209] Franco (2018c).

[210] The Municipal Elections of 2016 were the second elections that applied the law (2.034/2009).

[211] Franco (2018c).

[212] Ibid.

> *Let's go together, as a collective, to lead the debate about the favelas, the debate about gender, in this city that is so exclusive. And so, what now constitutes as the three pillars, as we call them in our campaign, is the debate about gender, the debate about race, blackness, ancestry; to talk about these black women that live in a favela, their children, their personal losses, their struggles, their jobs. So, this is the triad of gender, race, and the city.*[213]

These three pillars of the campaign grounded the composition of Marielle's cabinet. She had a specific team focusing on each of the three constituent themes: the gender, race and the city. The gender team advocated the rights of women and sexual minorities, the race team focused on combatting racial discrimination and the city/favela team was centered around defending the fundamental human rights of favela residents. Marielle's office used intersectionality as a critical praxis in the planning of public policies.[214] She states:

> *Cities must be managed democratically from an intersectional perspective of class, race and gender. (…) Infrastructure, public security and projects of urban mobility must be thought about through the eyes of the sectors of the society that are the most vulnerable and therefore require more attention (…).*[215]

As previously discussed, Kimberlé Crenshaw conceptualised intersectionality principally as a device to expose the ways in which certain groups' experiences are neglected, leading to omissions in law, public discussion and policy setting (see section 4.2.1). Marielle's deployed the critical praxis of intersectionality as a tool to remedy the exclusion of women, in particular black women, favela residents and LGTB+ women from political institutions. Emphasising these groups' distinct experiences in the city talks against the single authoritative voice, which is institutionalised through public policies. Marielle argued that such a dominant voice is hidden under the discourses that are simply regarded as 'economicist', subsequently rendering them 'apolitical'. The intention of her office was to politicise the everyday concerns of low-income black women, such as the questions of day-care centres and transportation. Instead of approaching such issues as 'individuals' problems' as is usual, Marielle asserted that they should be solved collectively by effectively politicising them.[216] I will next discuss how the councilwoman articulated for centering the concerns of low-income black women in the

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[213] *Mídia NINJA* (2016b).

[214] See Collins (2015).

[215] Franco et al. (2017).

[216] Agora É Que São Elas #AEQSE (2019); Motta (2017).

agenda of the left as well as in feminist discussions, domains which have traditionally been committed to eradicating systems of inequality.

In her 2017 article, Marielle lays out the conjuncture of rising conservatism and the increasing appeal of authoritarianism in the current political landscape, thus naming the main challenges faced by the progressive left. Charting the contemporary left's future, she lists what ought to be its priorities:

> *a) to advance emerging [civil rights] claims such as "direct elections now" and "not one right less"; b) to defend life by means of preventing lethal violence and protecting human dignity c) to formulate public policies to mitigate the impact of the capitalist machinery in Brazil; d) to strengthen the narrative for peaceful conviviality in the city by valuing differences, and to recover the idea that the fundamental challenge is about overcoming inequalities; e) to center the bodies inhabiting the peripheries of the city as significant actors of social change, among whom black and poor women stand out, with an emphasis on favela residents (…).*[217]

It is important to note here that Marielle appeals for the left to recognise the black and low-income women of the favelas as central political actors. I have previously demonstrated how favela women engage in struggles within their communities (see section 5.1.4). As pointed out by Marielle in various interviews, and also, considering the statistics of political representation examined at the beginning of this section, it can be concluded that the leftist party politics are not devoid of the oppressive structures of society, such as racism, sexism and classism. Marielle speaks against the discrimination within the left, which has also kept its doors closed to black women. As described above, this entails a call to expand the contemporary left's agenda to include that of black feminists: the defense of human rights, broadening of the prevailing understanding of civil rights and the debate of public security with its focus on the protection of vulnerable bodies.

Equally important to emphasise is the priority, set by Marielle, of strengthening the narratives for peaceful and respectful conviviality. In this respect, black women from the favelas have a strategic role in bringing about democratic advances. According to Marielle, they are the ones to speak emphatically "against sexism, racism and the growing impact of xenophobic

[217] Franco (2017a).

ideology".[218] Marielle's emphasis here brings to mind Patricia Hill Collins' concept of 'outsider within'. The black feminist scholar has described the possibilities embodied in the marginal status of black women. While marginality can be a painful experience, it can also be considered as a source of creativity and potential. She asserts that it is possible to take advantage of this outsider position, for it provides a certain kind of epistemological privilege to understand societal problems.[219]

Embodying the perspective of a black feminist favela resident, Marielle's platform also appeals for the feminist movements (largely white and middle-class) to expand their agenda. Namely, she challenges all feminists to engage in dialogue with low-income women and to broaden their discussion beyond the issues of abortion, women's autonomy and the lexicon of sexual identities:

> *These women who are in Maré today, who are not yet discussing cis, trans, heterosexual and binary issues. I think this is an agenda that the feminist movement needs to take into consideration, along with other topics like abortion, and the debate on women's autonomy. We need to talk about kindergarten, about the women of favelas, about how these women are vulnerable and suffer from violence. For example, how does having the feeling of being exposed to violence affect them? We need to talk about this as a women's issue.*[220]

Even though Marielle was openly lesbian and in favour of legalising abortion, she knew that in the religious context of the favelas, these are not themes that most women connect with. Instead, Marielle emphasises the need to discuss topics such as public funding for day nurseries and the impact of state violence on the lives of women. As I have previously discussed (see sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.4), low-income favela women are particularly dependent on the welfare policies of the state, on the one hand, and also suffer in the face of repressive public security policy, on the other. The question of state violence is where the gap between anti-racism and feminism is particularly profound in Brazil. The violence to which black women and their families are subjected to in their daily lives is rarely discussed within

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[218] Franco (2017a, p. 92).

[219] Collins (2005, p. 12).

[220] Mídia NINJA (2016b).

feminism. In sum, Marielle underscores the need to extend the feminist debate and to assert women's political role in relation to the state.

As Marielle's account above implies, her office also sought to establish a dialogue with women who did not identify as feminists or agree with the proposals of the progressive left. Under her term, she proposed practical solutions to the principal challenges faced by the low-income women of the city. This way she could negotiate across ideological divisions to further her aims. As explained by the Brazilian political scientist Luis Felipe Miguel, it has been very difficult for the parties of the progressive left to reach the poorest population, especially in Rio de Janeiro. Miguel remarks that Marielle signalled a chance to alter the situation since "after all, she was someone who came from a poor community and dedicated the best of her efforts to them."[221] Thus, Marielle was an important interlocutor between the party politics and Rio's disadvantaged population. In the next section, I will demonstrate how she took on this role long before taking office as a councillor.

5.2.3. Framing Human Rights

As I have previously discussed (see 5.1.5), Marielle Franco and Renata Souza were members of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and Marielle was later appointed as its coordinator under the chairmanship of Marcelo Freixo (PSOL-RJ). Over the ten-year-period in the Commission, Marielle and Renata participated in establishing it as an arena for a dialogue between the governmental sphere and the civil society organisations. The contemporary conception of human rights, the idea that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", is based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In Brazil, human rights were consolidated through the 1988 Constitution. The writing of the new constitution depended on the participation of the pro-democracy social movements that had struggled against the military dictatorship, which lasted for two decades. It entailed the claims made by blacks, women, urban and rural workers, indigenous people as well as various

[221] Miguel (2018).

religious and professional associations.[222] Despite its comprehensiveness, the constitution has not ended what is referred to as structural violence. Brazil's problem has therefore not been a lack of human rights legislation, but the failure to implement such laws. The democratic state of law in Brazil has proved to be tolerant or complicit of violations of the human rights of historically excluded populations and incapable of holding guilty parties responsible.[223]

The members of the Human Rights Commission analyse state deputies' proposals and attend to the victims of human rights abuses, mainly the poor and black population of the urban peripheries. In Rio, this work has been developed into a methodology that gives voice to social movements and grassroots activists. Public hearings form an integral part of the Commission's modus operandi. According to the former chairman, Marcelo Freixo, the Comission receives "the most brutal reality of human rights violations". Their victims must be encountered with sensitivity: "Working with human rights is working with listening. It's about working with perception. It's about using all of our senses. And we take this into the institutional domain."[224] The majority of those who recur to the Commission are women; mothers, wives and sisters of murdered individuals. For Marielle, it was important that the composition of the commission would mirror the profile of the attended victims: black women with a favela background:

> *As a result of our self-analysis, we understood that it was fundamental that our life history needed to be present. When we realised that those on the Commission needed to have this colour, this background, this gender, this position of recognition. (…) That you can be a woman and take responsibility for being on the front line… that you can work there with the background of a* favelada *and take on an important role.*[225]

The above account also highlights the meaning of intersectionality for the Human Rights Commission. Patricia Hill Collins has stated that human rights are a "vitally important area for intersectionality as critical praxis".[226] Human rights practitioners commonly draw from intersectionality to understand social injustices that are characterised by complex social inequalities. Collins makes a distinction between the letter of the law and the work carried out

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[222] Azeredo Garcia Caporal & Silva Lima (2018, pp. 6-7).

[223] Assumpção et al. (2018, p. 133).

[224] Freixo (2019).

[225] Freixo (2018).

[226] Collins (2015, p. 16).

in relation to human rights: “actualizing human rights means transcending the limitations of a strictly legal statement of human rights”.[227] This means that the human rights practitioners, who often have an up close and personal relationship with violence, actively engage in defining and actualising human rights. In this process, conceptualising discrimination becomes important.[228] In my research context, the phenomenon identified as ‘the genocide of black youth’ (see section 2.1) and the legal framing of feminicide (see section 2.1 for discussion of how feminicide in Brazil is closely connected to race and class) both evoke intersectionality as a critical praxis. Marielle’s account in a documentary portraying the ten-year journey of the Commission exemplifies how she framed the concept of human rights:

> *It is fundamental to emphasise the specificities that go into the composition of the Human Rights Commission, that is composed primarily of women and attends primarily to women. This is not only important for my life trajectory but it is also important for the life trajectories of the women of the state of Rio de Janeiro. We must discuss gender identities, violations that we women suffer, in particular when we try to get around in the city, to speak of the official indicators that demonstrate that there are high rates of violations, rapes, homicides. The data of the IESP*[229]*, for example, always show that there are high rates of violence against women in the state of Rio de Janeiro. So, if there is are high rates of violations against women, there is a need for special services, shelter. When you arrive at this Commission and see this composition where you recognise these women, where you encounter with these women (…) it makes sense when we say that defending the human rights is to defend the rights of women.*[230]

It is obvious that Marielle centers women, and black women in particular, in her conception of human rights. This work developed for over a decade in the Human Rights Commission was reflected on Marielle’s agenda and laid the basis for the Women’s Defense Commission that was chaired by her from 2017 until March 14, 2018. In addition to the themes described above, her human rights agenda included the debate of public security, psychosocial disorders among favela residents, female imprisonment, suicides of women, sexual objectification of women and maternal deaths.[231] Her legislative proposals were centred on combatting specific forms of violence experienced by black women. Among the priorities of her cabinet was a

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[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] IESP-UERJ – Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. (Eng. Institute of Social and Political Studies of the State University of Rio de Janeiro).

[230] Freixo (2019).

[231] Franco (2018d, pp. 27-28).

project that guaranteed the right to abortion within the parameters established by the abortion law[232], labelled “If it is legal, it has to be real”. In her seminar speech of 2017, she spells out her concept of human rights:

> *Who are these women? What is the profile of this prison population? Once again: they are black women, poor women, women from the favelas and from the urban outskirts. And this is a theme which, in my view, is traversed by feminism, and that aims to broaden the concept of Human Rights.*[233]

While Marielle’s emphasis might seem obvious, it is worth considering the remarks made by feminists, such as human rights scholar Rebecca Adami, who has argued that the marginalisation of non-Western women’s voices has lead to conceptions of human rights that reflect the concerns and freedoms of a universal male subject and neglects the lived realities and challenges of women.[234] The scholar calls for a radical human rights politics to contest the Eurocentric, individualistic and male-centered concept of human rights. According to Adami, this can be attained through counter-narratives.[235] In my view, Marielle’s black feminist-imbued conception of human rights holds this radical potential. Her anti-punitive feminism is particularly polemical in Brazil where certain sectors of the society regard human rights defenders as ‘defenders of bandits’.[236]

Finally, Marielle’s self-understanding as a human rights defender was marked by what black feminists call ‘ancestry’ (Br. ‘ancestralidade), which in general terms refers to valuing the legacy of the previous generations. In a 2018 video clip, Marielle pays a homage to the knowledge transmitted by the elders:

> *(…) this coordination perspective [of the Comission] that attends [the victims], elaborates and does things together… I was not the one who invented that when I*

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[232] Abortion has constituted a crime in Brazil since the late nineteenth century. However, it can be practiced in three instances: If there is no other way to safe the life of the pregnant woman, the pregnancy results from rape or in the case of anencephaly of the fetus.

[233] Franco (2018d, p. 30).

[234] Adami (2015 p. 16).

[235] Ibid. (p. 13)

[236] See Caldeira (1991).

> *coordinated [the Commission]. I learnt it from Sidney Teles*[237]*. I think it is important to acknowledge those who came before us… the elders, those who teach us.*[238]

The next section will futher explore this topic and demonstrate how Marielle deployed black feminist narratives to empower black women to participate in party politics.

5.2.4. 'Our Steps Come from Afar'

As I described in the introduction of this thesis, Marielle moderated an event called 'Young Black Women Moving Power Structures' in the city centre of Rio on 14 of March, 2018. Together with other black feminist activists, Marielle articulated her life experiences within the black women's movement:

> *Being where I am today, I am very pleased with the construction of my life trajectory, which cannot be just an individual construction. It predates this one year and a few months in office. It is indeed that our steps come from afar. On the city council… just a brief fact: We came ten years after Jurema [Batista], and ten years before Jurema there had been Benedita [da Silva]. We cannot wait another ten years or think that I will be there for ten years.*[239]

Marielle positions herself within the genealogy of politicians who paved the way for black women in the local politics. In 1982, Benedita da Silva (PT-RJ) became the first black woman to be elected onto Rio's city council. Like Marielle, da Silva was born and raised in a favela, and struggled for favela residents' rights and also for gender and racial equality. These intersectional components were already included in her first campaign that ran, curiously, under the slogan 'woman, black and *favelada*'. Benedita da Silva has held positions in the National Congress, the Senate and the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, being the first black woman to reach the highest political positions in Brazilian history.[240] Jurema Batista (PT-RJ), in turn, was elected in the municipal elections of 1992, ten years after da Silva. Batista entered in politics as a community leader and came to create an important political career, as she was as a councillor for ten years. The above-mentioned politicians used their

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[237] Sidney Teles is a popular educator and former member of the Human Rights Commission of ALERJ.

[238] Freixo (2018).

[239] Franco (2018b).

[240] da Silva & da Silva Almeida (2020, p. 279).

intersectional identities as black women and favela residents to assert political proposals that were structured around race, class and gender. Rather than being confined to advancing the interests of specific segments, however, their projects reflected on broad societal structures. This characterises the profile of black female politicians of the progressive left.[241]

The expression ‘our steps come from afar’, used by Marielle, is an expression of the Brazilian black women’s movement, and it refers to the long tradition of activism.

> *(…) when I say that our steps come from afar, it’s not just a catchphrase. It means that many black women, many women from the favela have presided over residents’ associations and ran for office.*[242]

Brazilian black feminist Jurema Werneck, whose 2009 article carries the title ‘Our Steps Come from Afar’, defines the identity of black women in relation to the history of the black women’s movement and its resistance strategies, rather than to the experience of oppression as such. Werneck remarks how the society that is structured around Eurocentric, racist and patriarchal models continues to disqualify and dehumanise black women. For this reason, they should refuse to adhere to these models and instead embark on a project of “searching for their own voice”.[243] The scholar towards looking for alternative identity markers in the history of the black women’s movement, and valorising its leadership symbols; its ‘iyalodes’. Iyalode is the title of a high-ranking female chieftain that originally existed in pre-colonial Yoruba cities in south-western Nigeria.[244] It is deployed by Werneck as a metaphor for women’s leadership and self-government, reminding us of black women’s ancestral heritage. According to her, evoking such symbols is needed to animate black women’s activism to challenge the status quo.[245]

Marielle often cites two political icons whose influence reached social movements, party politics as well as the academia: Angela Davis and Lélia Gonzalez. As someone with more local influence, Gonzalez was an important reference:

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[241] Lourenço & Marques (2018).

[242] Mayara e Yasmin (2017b).

[243] Werneck (2009, p. 162).

[244] Ibid. (p. 156).

[245] Ibid. (p. 162).

> *I took classes at the Department of Social Sciences, and had come to read Lélia Gonzalez, but I only understood the significance of this debate [of blackness] when taught by another professor who was black. In the other class where we discussed topics related to gender and race, the professor did not mention that Lélia Gonzalez had been a director of that Department. The erasure and denial of our histories manifests itself in various spheres. It was fundamental for me to find out that Lélia Gonzalez had been part of the restructuring of that Department of Social Sciences. That helped me to understand the main topics being discussed (…) It also brought forward this other perspective beyond the favela.*[246]

Marielle's account illustrates how it was a significant moment for her to find out that Lélia Gonzalez had been a director of the Department of Social Sciences of the PUC university, the department where she took courses. Lélia de Almeida Gonzalez (1935–1994) was an anthropologist, public intellectual, politician and activist in the movements of black women. She was one of the founders and key figures of the Unified Black Movement, historically the most significant black civil rights organization in Brazil. However, unlike the above-mentioned American black feminist, Gonzalez did not receive recognition despite all her significant contributions. This becomes apparent in Marielle's account: Gonzalez was not cited as a director of the department by a professor of social sciences, even at a class directly addressing the topics of gender and race. Marielle explained this to be one facet of the erasure and denial of black history.

Sueli Carneiro, one of the major Brazilian black feminist philosophers, uses the concept 'epistemicide', drawing from Boaventura de Souza Santos (1997), to explain the mechanism behind the erasure of black people's knowledge and the exclusion of black intellectuals. Excluding black protagonists reinforces the master narrative of white hegemony. As was further remarked by Carneiro, the modern-day version of epistemicide in academia manifests itself in the division between activist and academic discourses. According to Carneiro, this dualistic evaluation criterion on scientific knowledge works by disqualifying the voices of black researchers, such as the work of black feminists, who are often both scholars and activists.[247] The invisibility of the black presence in the academic domain is in strikingly contrast with a large volume of research, which broaches black people as an objects of study.

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[246] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a).

[247] Carneiro (2005, pp. 57-61).

This landscape is changing as more and more blacks are claiming their positions as subjects of research, refusing to be seen merely as research objects.

As I have previously discussed, affirmative-action measures have increased the number of black and low-income students in Brazilian universities (see section 2.1). In 2002, two public state universities, the State University of Bahia (UNEB) and the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), became the first ones in Brazil to implement affirmative action policies. This happens to be the same year Marielle began her university studies, giving us a glimpse of the context in which her narrative was shaped. Sociologist Ângela Figueiredo has noticed the increasing interest in thematising academic work on the black women's movements over the recent years. Figueiredo attributes this interest in black feminism to the empowerment of black women in the Brazilian society.[248] In the above paragraphs, I have demonstrated that Marielle drew inspiration from black feminist leaders, symbols, and narratives and used them to motivate black women into participating in party politics. I will further examine this and other topics related to black women's political representativity in the following sections.

[248] Figueiredo (2018, p. 1090).

5.3. The Occupation at Rio's City Hall

In the previous parts of the analysis, I have examined the standpoint of Marielle Franco as a favela resident, woman, mother, activist, scholar, black and intersectional feminist, and a human rights defender. In this final part of the analysis, I will further explore Marielle's political practices and her representativity from the perspective of other black women and favela residents. I will demonstrate how she used her leadership position to transform the city council from within, and highlight the innovativeness as well as the radicalness of her public office. She frequently used the term 'occupy', referring to her body-politics of a markedly black, *favelada* and feminist representativity, which defied the white patriarchal normativity of the institution. The councilwoman campaigned for the recognition and valuing of differences and fought against all forms of oppression and violence. Furthermore, Marielle was a powerful orator and used the speaker's platform to voice the concerns of Rio's marginalised communities, structurally excluded from the category of citizens. I will also show that they were not only included in her parliamentary speeches but also invited to participate in the collective effort of setting public policies.

5.3.1. Right to the City

One of the core debates entailed in the rallying cry and demand for the 'right to the city' is the nature of citizenship and who has the claim to the city. In Latin America, this ideal has inspired protest movements that challenge the dominant economic, social and political order and sparked proposals for fundamental legislative reform.[249] The notion was also deployed by Marielle to lay out the claim to full citizenship, including the right to shape the city by participating in institutional politics, by the city's socially and politically marginalised population. In particular, she used the notion to address the question of urban segregation; the duality of "the formal x informal city".[250] This socio-spatial division has been reinforced in

[249] The slogan of the right to the city emerged in the political and social upheavals of May 1968 in France, linked to the ideas of the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (Brown 2013, p. 957).

[250] Franco et al. (2017, p. 12).

Rio de Janeiro by the narrative of a ‘divided city’ (Br. ‘cidade partida’).[251] As implied above, the narrative works with the analogy of ‘two cities’: the formal and the informal city. The former comprises of residential districts developed by the public power, and shelters most of the city’s services. The so-called ‘informal city’ contains the self-built settlements by the urban poor, branded with persisting social stigma, and often considered ‘illegal’ and therefore not part of the city *per se*. Prejudices play an important role in the reproduction of urban segregation and end up influencing public policy setting (see section 5.1.3). For instance, Mirka Wendt has demonstrated that the criminalising narrative of the ‘informal city’ fuels the militarised response to managing urban conflicts.[252]

In the first part of the analysis, I discussed how the favela residents actively engage in everyday struggles within their communities, demanding public policies and resisting state control and repression (see section 5.1.4). The aim of this section is to explore one of the initiatives put in motion by the cabinet of Marielle in order to illustrate how the debate about urban segregation was taken forward on the city council. On 13 November 2017, the cabinet organised an event titled ‘Right to the Favela: Racism and Resistance, + Rolezinho 13/11’ to celebrate the Black Awareness Day (November 20). The social media page of the event states:

> *Black November is here and the cabinet of Marielle Franco invites everyone to the public discussion Right to the Favela: Racism and Resistance, in the City Hall, on 11/13! Let’s occupy the house of the people with our black bodies and talk about resistance in the quilombos, in the favelas, on the asphalt and in the domain of public power!*[253]

As described above, the cabinet organised a public discussion concerning the ‘right to the favela’ in the City Hall. I will first examine the public discussion and then explain what is meant by *rolezinho*. Besides the councilwoman, the public discussion hosted four other speakers: Ana Paula Oliveira, the founder of the ‘Mothers of Manguinhos’ movement; Marilene Nunes of the Museum of Maré; Diego Santos, a journalist from the Borel favela; and Hellen Andrews from ‘Quilombo Urbano’. The speeches were registered in the official gazette of the city council. Marielle asserted the aim of the event:

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[251] See Almeida & Najar (2012) for further discussion on the concept’s origin.

[252] Wendt (2016).

[253] Franco (2017d).

> *MS. PRESIDENT (MARIELLE FRANCO) – (…) This initiative was very much pushed by the collective of the cabinet, a group composed of favela residents, focusing on the struggles of the favelas. It is a result of the seminar 'Right to the Favela', which took place a few months ago at the Museum of Maré, when we occupied all spaces. If we occupy all spaces, we have to occupy our City Hall with our black bodies, with our bodies of* favelados. *This is not secondary.*
>
> *MS. PRESIDENT (MARIELLE FRANCO) – (…) The nature of the debate is both symbolic and objective. We want to be here as blacks and favela people, and we want qualified public policies.*[254]

As described above, the cabinet of Marielle participated in a seminar organised in Maré to discuss law proposals concerning Rio's communities. The 'right to the favela' entails a broad spectrum of demands: housing, sanitation, healthcare, education, culture, decriminalisation of drugs, and public security.[255] Fundamentally, the objective of these proposals was to end the division between the formal and the informal city, discussed in the above paragraphs. Marielle uses the term 'occupy' emphatically, referring to an activist strategy of claiming entitlement to public spaces. The attempt of Marielle was to transform the institutional space by racialising it — both symbolically and objectively. Brazilian social scientist Flávia Biroli explains that political representativity entails two dimensions: one that is connected to the question of the body and the 'presence' of certain social markers and another linked to certain political demands and ideology.[256] Marielle's statement "[t]his is not secondary" means that both of them are equally important.

The councilwoman has remarked on how favela dwellers do not generally have a positive notion of party politics, nor do they find it easy to approach the people who traditionally inhabit the domains of power, people who they typically regard as "almighty men and women".[257] Besides breaking institutional barriers set for black women, Marielle also wished to "demystify" the political institution in order to challenge the notion of it as an elite space.[258] To that end, she invited favela residents to voice their demands on the city council.

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[254] Franco (2017e).

[255] Benedito (2017).

[256] Biroli (2018).

[257] Franco (2017a, p. 93).

[258] Revista Subjetiva (2017).

While Marielle was not the first black woman from a favela to have accessed the political institution (see section 5.2.4), her radical style of appropriating the institutional arrangements was new. Its impact is clearly transmitted through the participants' accounts:

> *MS. MARILENE NUNES – In her speech, she [Pamela Gomes; one of the participants] said: "I've never been here inside. I've never been here before", many women think the same way. It took a black woman from the favela to be elected, to open the doors for us to enter, because it is our right. Everyone has a right to this House, where everyone can enter, but it took a black woman from the favela to be elected, to open the doors for other women to enter.*[259]

> *MR. DIEGO SANTOS – I want to thank you for the opportunity to say that it will be wonderful to read the Official Gazette tomorrow, or in the next edition, and see the words "favela" and "blacks" written, since this is a debate that is often absent in this House. (…) So, we really need to claim this space. I think that this mandate is a key moment for us to claim this space in the legislation, and to guarantee, who knows, new and better days for us and our communities.*[260]

The above narratives demonstrate, on the one hand, in evocative detail the exclusion of favela residents, and on the other, the ground-breaking nature of Marielle's office. Several women brought it forward in their discourses that it was their first time in the City Hall, expressing how it had now become "their House as well". The term 'House' (Br. 'Casa'), spelled in capital letters in the original transcript, and used here by several speakers, refers to the City Hall. However, as noted by Flávia Biroli, it is a particularly descriptive term (it also means 'home' in Portuguese). Biroli notes that the entrance of someone, with whom they share common characteristics and social position, allowed the favela residents to reframe the institution as a place belonging to them as well.[261]

I will now discuss the act of *rolezinho* included in the public event 'Right to the Favela: Racism and Resistance', for it illustrates how Marielle's office employed creative cultural interventions in its efforts at transforming the institution. *Rolezinho* (literally 'little stroll') was described in the event description as an informal visit to "the backstage" of the City Hall that had the black presence in history, culture and politics as its theme.[262] Magana, a journalist

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[259] Franco (2017e).

[260] Ibid.

[261] Biroli (2018).

[262] Ibid.

of Rio on Watch, participated in the *rolezinho* tour. In her article, she explains that the term refers to a "group of people, usually black youth of the urban outskirts, who claim their right to the public space that was not initially meant for them".[263] The practice gained the attention of the media in 2013 and 2014 when a series of *rolezinhos* were organised in the shopping malls of wealthy neighbourhoods in various Brazilian cities. These gatherings of up to hundreds of low-income residents of the urban peripheries, were regarded with suspicion, and were even labelled as 'invasions' by some commentators.

Magana, like Marielle, conceptualises the *rolezinhos* as political acts. The disadvantaged urban youths are conscious of the stigma attached to them, and by organising gatherings in public places, they seek to question the attitudes which their presence evokes in these places. Attitudes, such as the discriminatory behaviour of security personnel and the discomfort of the middle and upper classes. Because of this, the Magana frames *rolezinhos* as "acts of civil disobedience", comparing them to the civil rights sit-ins in the Unites States of the 1960s.[264] In my view, it is not at all far-fetched to argue that Marielle's *rolezinho* tour through the corridors of the City Hall conveys a similar message. Furthermore, it questions the notion of normalcy within the political institution by criticising the absence of black people. Perhaps more radical measures of civil activism are indeed needed to fight against the institutionalised racism and to breach the gap between the favela population and the political institutions.

5.3.2. Black Feminist Imagery

In her account below, Mônica Fransisco, one of Marielle's advisers, describes vividly the her experience of being a part of the cabinet. Fransisco's description synthesises the main themes discussed in this section; namely, the organisational structure, practice, and representations of black feminist politics under Marielle's leadership.

> *For a little more than a year, we were part of this pulsating construction, experimenting every day on new way of doing politics, putting the "invisible" inside*

[263] Magana (2017).

[264] Ibid.

> *that palace*[265] *in the middle of Cinelândia. We did this in many ways: by proposing bills, resolutions, tributes, public hearings and transforming the Women's Commission into an important tool for dialogue with the city's female population. Even more unforgettable was the experience of that team of black women and men, the LGBT+ community, the first trans woman appointed into the house, the* favelados *and* faveladas *walking with their heads held high and that voice [of Marielle] filling the plenary – white, misogynist and completely oblivious to the common good.*[266]

I have previously demonstrated how Marielle deployed a critical praxis of intersectionality in the elaboration of public policies (see section 5.2.2). Each constituent theme on her agenda – the gender, race and the city/favela – was led by a coordinative body specialised in that particular area. I have also discussed how low-income women are often seen as passive targets of public policies, not only by conservative groups, but also by progressive ones (see section 5.1.3). For Marielle, it was fundamental to include these women in the process of elaborating new policies. Her staff of 20 individuals was comprised mostly of women (more than 80%), black people, and the first trans woman appointed onto the council. Because of its composition and feminist stance, her cabinet was labelled as '*mandata*'; a feminine version of the Portuguese term '*mandato*', referring both to the parliamentary office and to the team of advisers.

I have previously demonstrated (see section 5.2.1) how women and black women in particular, are under-represented in elected public offices relative to their proportion of the population. Thus, one of Marielle's priorities was to bring other black women onto the council with her. She had invited individuals, whom she considered as potential candidates to run for office in future elections, onto the council, mentoring them under her platform. According to her own words, this embodied the ethos of 'one climbs and lifts another', an expression used to emphasise solidarity and community empowerment within the Brazilian black women's movement:

> *(…) our starting point is 'one woman lifts another' – one of the mottos of the March of the Black Women in 2017. (…) we don't want to be alone in this space, we want to bring more people in to transform the politics.*[267]

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[265] The term 'palace' used by Fransisco refers to the Palace of Pedro Ernesto (Br. Palácio Pedro Ernesto), the City Hall, which houses the city council of Rio de Janeiro.

[266] Franco (2014/2018).

[267] Franco (2018c).

This practice has been discussed by Patricia Hill Collins as a distinct leadership model employed by black women activists. She brings forward Angela Davis's advice: "We must strive to 'lift as we climb.' … We must climb in such a way as to guarantee that all our sisters, regardless of social class, and indeed all of our brothers climb with us. This must be the essential dynamic of our quest for power".[268] Collins also recounts how black women activists have commonly rejected leadership models that are based on hierarchies, and struggled for an institutional transformation. She distinguishes between two versions of leadership: one of 'spokesperson' and another of 'centerperson'. Whereas the former version calls attention to an individual's negotiation skills on behalf of the others, the latter emphasises a horizontal communication style in which the leader uses their influence to foster solidarity among the workers. The latter has been found to be more prevalent among black women activists.[269] Marielle shunned hierarchies as well and preferred a model where power is shared. For instance, the coordinative body of her office held regular meetings where she was "only one of the members".[270]

Furthermore, her black feminist leadership strategy strengthened affiliated networks with groups struggling for common causes. Her parliamentary activities included attending demonstrations organised by social movements, and she used her position to promote acts related to the rights of women, blacks, the LGTB+ community and the favela residents.[271] Many were inspired by Marielle, since her stance as a politician reflected the same militancy and activism that women exercise in their daily lives. According to Andreza da Silveira Jorge, an activist-scholar from the favela of Maré, Marielle drew resources from the women's militancy, which was present in her community:

> *(…) where I come from, in the* Complexo da Maré, *we have a history of women organising themselves politically, women who have been politically active for a long time. In my view, Marielle is a symbol [of political resistance] because she managed to reach that extremely discriminative place – with all her representativity – but she still nurtured the ideas and politics that exist within these communities.*[272]

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[268] Collins (2005, p. 219).

[269] Ibid (p. 220).

[270] Instituto Update (2018/2019).

[271] Equipe Veradora Marielle Franco (2018, p 34).

[272] data_lábia (2018).

In her account, da Silveira Jorge explains how favela residents like herself conceptualise politics from a distinct point of view. For her, politics is about the mundane struggles to gain access to clean water, to pave the streets and so forth, all of which require the collective organisation on the part the residents. Organising around essential needs in the low-income urban neighbourhoods is typically driven by women concerned with their family member's well being. In sum, Marielle's concept of politics was influenced by the mundane and long-standing collective organisation of women, and her praxis as a councillor reflected this understanding. Rethinking the concepts of politics in such a way can certainly be empowering for low-income women, especially when one sees it actualised on the institutional level.

I will use the last paragraphs of this section to demonstrate that Marielle was visibly empowered and nurtured the same empowerment in others. For Marielle, it was important to claim the black feminist identity in order to resist the notion of institutional politics as a "place for men".[273] She describes that her empowerment had mainly been the result of gaining black awareness and showing it through her hairstyle, how she dressed herself and carried her body in public space.[274] Brazilian urbanist Joice Berth has noted that hair is an important aesthetic element of self-affirmation for black women, and often the first step towards personal empowerment. Even though the individual process of strengthening one's self-esteem is important, empowerment – as black feminists understand it – is always a collective process accompanied by the aim of eradicating disempowering power structures. Berth thus emphasises the political understanding of aesthetics.[275] In the same vein, Malta and Oliveira explain that valorising black aesthetics is fundamental to resist the dissemination of whiteness as the parameter of beauty, which again is one of the most effective mechanisms of racism.[276] As further noted by Berth, empowerment is connected to representativity and 'to seeing oneself' literally in the domains of power.[277] This is why it was important for Marielle to assert the right to 'be herself' in these institutional spaces and resist their norms and codes of conduct. The account of Ana Paula Paulino, cultural producer and friend of Marielle, offers a

[273] Franco et al. (2017).

[274] Mayara e Yasmin (2017a).

[275] Berth (2018, p. 103).

[276] Malta & Oliveira (2016, p. 66).

[277] Berth (2018, p. 103).

special insight into Marielle's representativeness from the perspective of a young black woman:

> *She used to say that she was a* favelada *and a* funkeira[278]*, and I thought that it was amazing. As a black woman, you are conscious of the rules… that you have to have a certain posture, to speak and dress in a certain way (…) But Marielle was herself at all times, be it on the city council or having lunch with me (…) She was herself at all times, and it gave me* strength and hope that you don't need to change yourself when you access certain spaces. She just was there in her own way, with her own style. She put on the turban and went on fighting with a group of men in that City Hall. That was everything to me.[279]

The account of Ana Paula Paulino portraits Marielle as an authentic person, who, by asserting the right to 'be herself' in the institutional space, empowered other black women by showing that they do not have to change themselves in order to access these spaces.

5.3.3. 'Our Lives Matter!'

Accessing the political institution was not the only challenge that Marielle and her staff faced. After reaching a leadership position, black women often need to fight marginalisation and discrimination in addition to other forms of political violence. If they manage to transgress the imposed boundaries and access spaces other than those designated for them, this evokes reactions of "surprise, discomfort and hostility" from the society.[280] Such attitudes are also present on the city council, and Marielle addressed them frequently in her speeches:

> *MS. MARIELLE FRANCO – (…) we will not tolerate any type of violence, even if it is not physical, merely verbal: a joke in the bathrooms of this House; or some kind of inappropriate behaviour, because doing so makes all of us vulnerable. Soon people will even want to question whether a turban, which I and some fellow companions wear, has this or that inside of it.*[281]

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[278] *Funkeira* refers to a woman who enjoys funk music and considers it as part of her lifestyle.

[279] Mídia NINJA (2018).

[280] Franco et al. (2017, p. 12).

[281] Franco (2017c).

She deemed confronting the daily micro-aggressions necessary in order to guarantee the full inclusion of black women in the creation of public policies. It was a daily struggle to sustain one's standpoint as a black feminist on the council. In this light, the strategies described in the previous section can be considered as important resistance strategies against the often hostile environment full of institutional gender and racial discrimination as well as hate discourse against LGTB+ people. The '*mandata*' was thus considered as a "collective group confronting the predominantly male, white and conservative Legislative House".[282]

As a minority representative of the progressive left, Marielle acknowledged the difficulty of securing a sufficient amount of votes to pass bills in this kind of an environment, which is why many of her parliamentary proposals dealt with awareness raising and political recognition. In particular, she considered visibility to be an effective strategy to generate discussion concerning the rights of women, blacks and sexual minorities. Take for instance the bill 'Lesbian Visibility Day', which was one of the LGTB+ -themed laws closest to getting approved. The demand to include the date in the city's official calendar had been a part of the lesbian women's movement's agenda since 1996. Marielle considered passing the law particularly important since lesbian and bisexual women suffer from marginalisation, both in their private lives as well as in the public sphere, and as we know, suffer from high rates of violence. Brazil has one of the highest LGBT+ reported mortality rates in the globe, and on top of that, Rio de Janeiro is among the Brazilian cities with the highest rates of lethal violence against them.[283]

Having a voice is considered a weapon of the powerless. In this respect, I will next focus on Marielle's insurgent voice and demonstrate how she used it on the city council. This aspect of insurgency was already well present in her campaign for councillor:

> *For us women, it is a daily struggle. We feel its reflections everyday when we take our children to the school, and there is no class. When we have to work but there are no vacancies in the kindergarten. We feel disrespected in public transport, underestimated at work, undervalued on the streets, violated at home; and between the alleys and the lanes of the favelas surviving is our greatest resistance. Now, it's our turn to occupy a place in the city and in the politics, to get what is ours by*

[282] Equipe Veradora Marielle Franco (2018, p. 3).

[283] Ibid. (pp. 33-34).

> *right. Our voices, which have been constantly silenced, must be heard. Now it is the time to make them count. I am strong because we all are.*[284]

At the plenary, Marielle made a frequent use of the speaker's platform, which now bears her name, to defend the rights of women and the black population, and to denounce the oppression against LGTB+ people and the favela residents. Her stance as a black feminist, to combat all forms of oppression and violence, can be seen as 'political intersectionality', as she proposed the joining of forces to address these issues.[285] I would like to stress that Marielle approached the topic of state violence from a distinct perspective, which held the government accountable for state agents' orders as well as for failing to protect the lives of its more vulnerable population. In particular, she emphasised that in addition to police raids and mass imprisonment, the low-income black population also suffers from insufficient investments in healthcare, education and public transport.

Governmental neglect is the cause of otherwise easily preventable deaths. An example of this was brough up by Marielle in one of her speeches held in Santiago, Chile in 2017, titled 'Struggles to Access the Right to Mobility as a Latin American Black Woman'. Marielle brought up the case of a biology student who was killed when her foot got stuck between a train door. She explains that rather than being an isolated case, a simple accident, this was a reflection of the inadequate public transportation system, non-existent communication with the low-income population and, ultimately, a reflection of a system that neglects black lives.[286] Judith Butler has discussed this topic under the notion of 'precarity', referring to conditions that are unfit to live in, including "unmanageable exposure to arbitrary loss, injury, or destitution".[287] Such conditions affect the certain sectors of the population more severely than others, sustaining the idea that lives are not considered "equally grievable or equally valuable".[288] Racism is a central factor in this.

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[284] Franco (2016).

[285] See Crenshaw (1991).

[286] Franco (2017f).

[287] Butler (2015, p. 68).

[288] Ibid. (p. 96).

The disregard towards black bodies also manifests itself in the institutional discourse. As we know, Marielle was a fierce critic of the prevailing public security policy in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Besides speaking out against police brutality and the militarisation of poor neighbourhoods, she also addressed the dehumanisation of black people's deaths, which are not spoken about in the institutional space, or they are only mentioned as mere numbers in statistical accounts.

> *MS. MARIELLE FRANCO – (…) It is essential for us to make use of the speaker's platform, especially on a day like today, when another seven-year-old girl lost her life in Maré. I was talking to some fellow council members about Thayana's pain – another woman from the favelas and, in this case, from the favela of Maré. In a gunfight, be it between drug traffickers or during a police raid, one more child victim of a stray bullet. The debate over Public Security, as I said in yesterday's speech, cannot be ignored in this House. (…) the public security policy needs to ensure people's right to feel secure. A child, Fernanda Adriana Caparica Pinheiro, was murdered. These instances and lives cannot only be turned into mere statistics.*[289]

Marielle thus brought the individual stories of the favela residents into the institutional space, naming the victims of the public policy fallaciously labelled as one of 'security'. As we know, Marielle fell victim to the same policy, for her life was not secured. Although we do not yet know what reasons led to her assassination or who crafted the plan for the brutal crime, it is possible to contextualise her death from a sociological perspective by taking into account her vulnerable position at the intersection of multiple oppressions. As a black, bisexual, *favelada* woman, and a public human rights defender who dared to enter institutional politics to combat the inequality and violence perpetuated within Rio de Janeiro, she was considered as undesirable by many powerful people who do not want certain groups to achieve positions of visibility and political influence. After all, Marielle took her seat at the table all the while intending to alter the rules of the game. In one of her campaign videos, Marielle had proclaimed:

> *It is one thing to reside in, be born in, and live in the favela, and another thing to claim and use this position of a* favelada *to do politics in a different way. So we will go and do our part in politics: we will resist, we will confront, and that is one of the things that I am proud of.*[290]

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[289] Franco (2017b).

[290] Mídia NINJA (2016b).

While everything points to Marielle being murdered for political reasons, I agree with the commentators who suggest that the emotional factor cannot be left out of the speculation. She had never received any threats but was conscious of the discomfort and conflicts that her presence evoked among many people. As a black woman, declaredly lesbian or bisexual, and a *favelada* woman, she rejected the subaltern position imposed upon these groups, and demanded to be heard at the centre of power, where she did not apologise for taking space and speaking out loud. Notwithstanding her public position as a councillor, her voice was violently silenced. Furthermore, the hateful discourse she received after her death shows how many people view the groups which she represented as less worthy of mourning for, or even as subjects deserving of death.

Renata Souza has suggested that Marielle's summary execution could be defined as a'political feminicide'. With this classification, she aims to elucidate the murders of female leaders, a factual but unrecognised reality of the Brazilian political landscape. As the notion of feminicide, such a term is needed, since "in legal jargon, what cannot be named, does not exist". Souza remarks on how political feminicide marks women's vulnerability in political life.[291] Considering the style and the location of the assassination, it is possible to frame Marielle's death as a leadership decapitation, which sends a particular message to those following in her footsteps. Thus, it renders them, as well as the groups who she defended, increasingly vulnerable. For this reason, bringing justice to her case is not only important for individuals – the family, friends and relatives of Marielle – but also for the Brazilian justice system and democracy as well.

[291] Souza (2019).

6 Discussion

6. Discussion

In the first part of the analysis, I discussed the central themes in Marielle's personal narrative: early motherhood, economic precarity, education and activism. As a sociologist, and an 'organic intellectual', Marielle was highly conscious of her position as a low-income black mother within intersecting power structures. Like many other black women, Marielle too experienced the impact of 'patriarchal machismo' (she raised her daughter as a single mother), neoliberal capitalism (she worked under precarious conditions with a minimum wage) and racial discrimination (the public security policy deployed in Rio's favelas criminalises the black youth, rendering them vulnerable to human rights violations). Education provided Marielle an escape from the cycle of poverty, and she managed to make the best of the educational opportunities: she made it to the small minority in her community that held a higher education degree. In such a context, values and attitudes cultivated by the family can make a great difference. As Marielle stated herself, family support was important and influenced her decision to become a researcher. Yet, Marielle never framed her scholarly achievements into an individual success story, instead she always highlighting the importance of the community; notably, the Communitary Preparatory School and her colleagues, the fellow intellectuals of Maré.

In the private university, mainly composed of middle- and upper-class students, Marielle had to negotiate with social differences. She claimed her identity as a *favelada* and fought against the stereotypes and stigma attached to this social category. Marielle and her colleagues from Maré thematised the favela in their research, and by means of incorporating their insider perspectives, challenged the 'deficit narratives' about the favelas. Marielle's engagement in the activism within Maré grew over the years. The intensified militarisation in the beginning of the early 2000s was a turning point for both Marielle Franco and Renata Souza, who were drawn to the debate over public security. Their personal losses fuelled the human rights activism in the favelas. Due to their activism and participation in the campaign of Marcelo Freixo, Marielle and Renata were invited to put together the state deputy's team that was concerned with the issues of the favelas. Most importantly, the two participated in the Human Rights Commission, chaired by the deputy, and helped establishing it as a place for dialogue

between social movements and collectives and the institutional domain. Marielle also came to coordinate the Commission itself. With her colleagues, she analysed the propositions made by the state deputies and attended to the victims of human rights abuses. Many of the victims who recurred to the Commission were low-income black women who had lost their family members to state violence.

In the second part of the analysis, I contextualised the election of Marielle onto Rio's city council and illustrated how the topics discussed in the first part formed the base on which Marielle's built her political agenda. Whereas the first part of the analysis had emphasised Marielle's standpoint as a favela resident, the second shifted the emphasis onto Marielle's standpoint as a black woman, also identifying herself as a black and intersectional feminist. Such a distinction is purely analytical, and justified by the attempt to manage complexity according to the *intracategorical approach.* Marielle's election was contextualised in relation to the political mobilisation of black women within the feminist movement. I also showed that Marielle's campaign, later turning into an agenda, was based on three 'pillars': gender, race and the city. Each of these was directed by a different team. The gender team focused on issues concerning gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities, the race/blackness team combatted racial discrimination, and the city/favela team was concentrated on advocating human rights within favela territories. While divided into separate segments, the praxis of the cabinet was intersectional, which meant that team members collaborated with each other. I also argued that Marielle used her 'outsider-within' position to her advantage, considering it as a source for capacity. Marielle regarded the black women from the favelas as potential leaders within the contemporary progressive left. To that end, she advocated for the left to include the black women's agenda, such as the debate over public security.

Besides a councillor and a sociologist, Marielle was a public security policy specialist. She came to work closely with the setting of the policies over the ten-year period that she worked in the Human Rights Commission under Freixo's chairmanship. Her experiences were collected into her Master's thesis, which analysed the pacification policy (UPP) in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The praxis developed in the Human Rights Commission shaped Marielle's understanding of human rights. She focused on black women being victims of human rights

abuses but also viewed them as the strongest defenders. Despite the oppression, inequality and violence that disproportionately affect black women's lives, aspects which were constantly present in her work, Marielle refused to be disempowered by these. Instead, she deployed black feminist counter-narratives, paying homage to a long tradition of activism and political participation. She positioned herself within the lineage of black female politicians in Rio de Janeiro, who had been the national vanguard for black women's political organisation in the country, and paved the way for young black feminist activists to participate in institutional politics.

In the third and last part of the analysis, I discussed points related to the political representativeness of Marielle. I also illustrated the innovativeness and radicalness of her politics: she had 'occupied' the City Hall with the voices, demands and bodies of those similar to her; black women, people from the LGTB+ community, residents of the favelas and urban outskirts, activists and community leaders. Marielle campaigned for the recognition and valuing of differences, and fought against all forms of discrimination within the institutional space. Identifying as a markedly black and feminist member of the LGTB+ community, Marielle defied the white patriarchal and elite normativity of the city council also in symbolic terms. This was a significant aspect of her political representativeness. Marielle was a powerful orator and used the speaker's platform strategically to amplify the voices of Rio's marginalised communities. She spoke forcefully against the prevailing public security policy by means of individualising and, thus, humanising, the suffering and the personal losses of favela residents. Ones that are often presented as mere statistics. I also showed how Marielle did not only remember these individuals in her speeches, but also invited them to the institutional domain by organising public hearings, among other events.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that Marielle Franco is a central figure in Brazil's political landscape. She was engaged in essential discussions concerning public security, human rights and representative democracy. Marielle was amongst the generation of black women and favela residents that had accessed higher education institutions with great effort, overcoming structural inequalities that have traditionally excluded marginalised people from such spaces. Marielle was also amongst the emerging front of black feminist politicians of the

progressive left that have campaigned for more equal, just, and inclusive societies. Several black women connected to Marielle were elected in the general elections of 2018, giving continuation to her political legacy. I am writing this final chapter in October 2020, only a few weeks before the first round of the next municipal elections. More than 600 of the candidates for councillors across 260 Brazilian municipalities have signed an election promise to implement the priorities of the 'Agenda Marielle Franco' in case they become elected. The agenda is an initiative of the Marielle Franco Institute, headed by Marielle's sister, Anielle Franco.[292] In Rio de Janeiro, the widow of Marielle, Monica Benicio, is running for a councillor, and Renata Souza is a candidate for mayor.

While it has been exciting to follow the constantly evolving political situation in Brazil, it has also been one of the greatest challenges when writing this thesis. Furthermore, contextualising Marielle's politics has been a difficult task exactly because of its intersectionality. My thesis is not meant as a last word on the topic, but rather an entry. For instance, Marielle's activism as an LGTB+ community member would certainly deserve a more detailed discussion. I should also stress that this thesis is a case study, and for this reason it does not present generalisable findings, but an in-depth analysis. Finally, the aim of this thesis has been to give visibility to the actions and narratives of low-income black women as political actors. While the Global South has not exactly been voiceless or marginalised in Northern news articles, I hope that my research will further increase the interest towards Brazilian black feminists' political struggles, and that it will contextualise the political career and agenda of Marielle Franco for Northern readers.

[292] https://www.agendamarielle.com/.

7. References

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